

MEDIA RELEASE

For immediate release

Govt must reverse decision to slash psychology sessions from 20 to 10

Joint release from the Institute of Clinical Psychologists (ICP) and Australian Clinical Psychology Association (ACPA)

The Institute of Clinical Psychologists (ICP) and Australian Clinical Psychology Association (ACPA) are jointly calling for the Federal Health Minister to rescind the decision to not extend into 2023 the COVID measure which increased access to psychology sessions from 10 to 20.

The ICP and ACPA says the following findings supporting the current model, which are drawn from the government's Better Access review, appear to have been overlooked or ignored.

- **The Better Access Review found “levels of improvement were associated with the number of sessions consumers received [and] indications a relatively greater number of sessions may lead to better outcomes.”**
- **The review found uncontrovertibly that Better Access has been successful in treating people in private practices.**
- **The review found, based on the evidence, “those who receive treatment through Better Access tend to have positive outcomes [and] ... these outcomes are not related to sociodemographic factors like where people live or how much they earn.”**
- **“Better Access is not only reaching consumers with mild to moderate mental health conditions as it was originally intended to do but is also providing services for those with more severe mental illness.”**
- **The review found Better Access was successful in treating those with severe conditions and this group paid less than those with mild conditions.**

Prof. Caroline Hunt from ACPA said the government had ignored the results of clinical trials which demonstrate that more than 10 sessions are required to treat most mental health conditions.

“Unfortunately, we will have to turn away those who present with moderate and severe mental health conditions, as delivering only half a treatment would be unethical likely resulting in relapse or a worsening of the condition. The current system has delivered effective treatment for people in need across 2020 to 2022. We believe halving access to quality psychological interventions when we do not have alternative options in place is a mistake,” Professor Hunt said.

President of the ICP, Dr Marjorie Collins said that with only 10 available rebated sessions, all psychology can hope for is effective treatment of mild mental health conditions.

“The evidence tells us that reducing Medicare rebated sessions from 20 to 10 sessions will result in poorer mental health outcomes for our community, most particularly for those with moderate to severe mental health conditions. In fact, fewer Australians will get better” Dr Collins said.

An overhaul of mental health care in Australia is mooted to commence in January 2023 and ICP and ACPA are well placed to make a constructive contribution to the development of new models of care. This revision will take likely years, given the complexity and pace of previous revisions to mental health care.

While this overhaul of mental health services is underway, continuity of patient care is essential. Continued services that have been demonstrated to be effective must be continued while the mental health system is overhauled.

ENDS.