

## MEDIA RELEASE

# Australian Clinical Psychology Association

14th July 2020

The Australian Clinical Psychology Association (ACPA) calls for an immediate increase in the number of psychological treatment sessions available to people under the Better Access Medicare scheme.

ACPA President, Associate Professor Vida Bliokas, said “In this time of unprecedented stress and uncertainty, the need for accessible and effective mental health interventions is vital. Never before in our lifetime have we seen this number of people so severely impacted - economically, socially, physically and psychologically. The COVID-19 pandemic has created a perfect storm of suffering for so many, and we need to respond strongly with appropriate supports in order to avoid or, at least, reduce potential long-term negative impacts.”

People can see a psychologist under the Better Access Medicare scheme following referral from a GP, however the current rules only allow 10 treatment sessions per year. “We know that for many mental health issues, the evidence indicates that more than 10 sessions are required for a full course of treatment. It is like stopping a course of antibiotics half-way through the prescribed treatment - the condition is not managed as well as it could be, and will most likely return” A/Prof Bliokas said.

The Australian Clinical Psychology Association’s data from a survey of its members has shown that approximately half of the clients seen in early July were either nearing the 10-session annual limit or had reached the 10-session limit, and were considered to require further sessions to ensure adequate resolution of their condition. A/Prof Bliokas stated “it is difficult for practitioners to know that many of their clients receive sub-optimal treatment dosages as a result of the Medicare 10-session limit rule. Most cannot afford to continue to see a psychologist, and hence stop coming.”

“We recognise that the recommendations of the Medicare Benefits Scheme Review Taskforce and the Productivity Commission will inform future plans regarding the allocation of Medicare psychology sessions. However, the increased mental health need within the community in the context of the impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic is such that more immediate additional support is required. We are only half-way through 2020, a year in which the Australian people have experienced the twin crises of catastrophic bushfires and the COVID-19 pandemic. Provision of an additional 10 psychology sessions at this time would represent an important investment in the mental health of the Australian population, helping to ensure that those people requiring ongoing psychological intervention are able to access this in a timely, uninterrupted and clinically appropriate manner.”