

18 March 2013

**Re: Medicare support for psychological treatment**

Dear Prime Minister,

Nearly 6 months ago we wrote a letter to you raising concerns that we have heard from the Australian public and all of our mental health professions about the planned cuts to the length of psychological treatment accessible through Medicare. We urged you to reconsider the planned cuts however these went ahead. The result is that we now have a mental health system that does not meet basic minimum treatment guidelines established through decades of controlled scientific research worldwide.

Efforts to divert patients to the ATAPS program have failed to produce adequate levels of care, with many referrals being turned down and appointments in the ATAPS program often being capped to 6 sessions. This is even further below the minimum recommended treatment for most mental health conditions, particularly co-morbid, chronic, and severe conditions.

In our letter to you back in October 2012, we highlighted additional concerns that the Federal Minister for Mental Health had ignored our request to discuss this serious issue. We regret to report that the Minister has continued to ignore us since that time. We make the point that this reflects poorly on our Government about a very sensitive matter affecting many Australians.

Last week our petition was tabled in the senate with 11,563 signatories. The petition shows that there are tens of thousands voters across Australia who specifically want our politicians to legislate for Medicare to provide access to 15 to 20 appointments per year when a person is diagnosed with a mental health condition. That level of support meets an evidence-based standard of care for the treatment of high prevalence disorders, such as depression, anxiety, and post-traumatic stress disorder. For over a decade now, dose-response studies have shown that terminating therapy at 10 sessions will leave approximately two thirds of people in an ongoing state of distress with their mental health condition. Just as it is unacceptable to ignore the widespread public concern about the lack of support for psychological treatment, it is equally unacceptable to ignore well-established treatment standards developed through years of scientific research.

Once again, we repeat our call for you to urgently resolve this problem given that many Australians with a mental health condition will run out of therapy appointments in a few months time. Every Australian deserves a fair chance at recovery and the best possible options for mental health support.

I appreciate your urgent attention to this matter and anticipate your prompt reply. We would be pleased to discuss this issue with yourself or your advisors if needed.

Yours sincerely



**Dr Ben Mullings**  
**BScPsych(Hons) first class, MPsych(Counselling Psychology), PhD(Psychology)**  
**Practitioner Spokesperson**  
[Alliance for Better Access](http://betteraccess.net)