

18 March 2013

Re: Medicare support for psychological treatment

Dear Minister,

We refer to our prior requests for a meeting or telephone discussion about the 10 appointment limit on psychological treatment available through Medicare. We have requested a discussion to talk about our concerns with several letters and numerous emails and telephone calls to your both of your offices. It has been nearly 6 months since our most recent request for a meeting and we have not yet received a reply.

On behalf our group, which represents over 10,000 supporters from right across Australia, I must express deep disappointment at the lack of courtesy and willingness to sit down and talk about this serious issue of public concern. We have heard from people who have accessed therapy, their family, carers, friends, loved ones, and other concerned members of our community, who feel a sense of despair that they are being ignored by the Minister and our Government. They report forming the view that our Minister's unwillingness to talk about this issue shows that he either does not care or does not understand that there is a need for psychological treatment to be accessible. We ask you to consider how upsetting it is for those who are struggling to cope with a mental health condition to feel unheard by our politicians.

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. This level of support meets the basic minimum recommended psychological treatment for 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 for the Minister to ignore widespread public concern about the lack of support for psychological treatment, it is equally unacceptable to ignore scientific research.

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 falls even further below minimum treatment standards for most mental health conditions, particularly co-morbid, chronic, and severe conditions.

Once again, we repeat our request for a telephone discussion or face-to-face meeting with you at your earliest convenience to discuss these serious issues. I appreciate your urgent attention to this matter and anticipate your prompt reply.

Yours sincerely



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