

22 November 2022

MEDIA RELEASE

Mental health crisis: 87% of psychologists report cost as top barrier to accessing mental health services

New research from a peak psychology body has shown that psychologists believe cost is the main barrier to accessing mental health services, followed by long waiting lists and a shortage of psychologists.

The survey of almost 1000 psychologists in private practice, conducted by the **Australian Association of Psychologists** (AAPi), also revealed that more than a third of psychologists cannot take on new clients, with 61% reporting an increase in distress, anxiety and depression in the past year.

Other key issues emerging from the research were: low rebates, the cost of living crisis, the impacts of the two-tier rebate system, and the need for 20 Better Access sessions.

95% of respondents believe the Federal Government should retain the additional 10 Better Access Medicare sessions offered during the pandemic - rather than reverting to only 10 in 2023.

Early access to psychologists remains a concern, with 52.84% of clients on waiting lists longer than 4-6 weeks and 27% waiting longer than two months.

When it came to bulk billing, 49% of psychologists said they could not afford to bulk bill, compared with 37% last year. For those who do bulk bill, the majority bulk bill less than 25% of their clients.

The survey showed that standard consultation fees had increased dramatically due to the cost of providing services, with consults under \$100 decreasing by 40%; and consults in the \$201-225 range increasing by 57%.

AAPi Executive Director Tegan Carrison said the average standard consult fee in 2022 was \$176 - \$200 yet the current rebate for most clients of registered psychologists was \$89.65 - half of the average consult fee.

“The current Medicare rebate is woefully inadequate, leaving vulnerable clients simply unable to afford care,” she said.

“As the cost of living increases in general, the ability of clients to access mental health care diminishes.

“And the two-tier rebate, with clients of registered psychologists receiving \$89, while clients of clinical psychologists getting a \$130 rebate for exactly the same kind of service - continues to hurt thousands of people needing mental health support,” Ms Carrison said.

Conducted in the first fortnight in November, the survey also showed the following:

- 73% of psychologists would be able to bulk bill more if the client rebate was raised to \$150 for a 50 minute session
- 63% of respondents indicated there had been an increase in the need for their services in 2022
- 38% were not accepting new clients
- 77% of psychologists/practices reported an increase in the cost of providing services.
- 95% offered telehealth
- 59% of psychologists provided NDIS services, an increase of 4% from the previous year
- 57% believed cost and time to see a GP prior to seeing a psychologist was a barrier.

Ms Carrison said AAPi was concerned about the wellbeing of the psychology workforce, with 38% of respondents reporting a worsening of their own mental health compared with last year.

“The demands on the mental health system and on those who provide the care continue to be overwhelming,” she said

“The reality is we need significant reforms urgently and realistic investment into all mental health services to ensure our community stays well. An investment in mental health is an investment into a healthy economy.

“Psychologists deserve to be better recognised for the valuable expertise and care they provide to a nation whose mental health is collectively in crisis.”

See graphic attached for more survey results.

Tegan Carrison is the Executive Director of the Australian Association of Psychologists Inc (AAPi), a not-for-profit peak body representing all psychologists in Australia.

About Australian Association of Psychologists Inc (AAPi)

The AAPi is a not-for-profit peak body for all psychologists that aims to preserve the rich diversity of psychological practice in Australia. Formed in 2010 by a group of passionate grassroots psychologists, the AAPi’s primary goal is to address inequality in the profession and represent all psychologists and their clients equally to government and funding bodies. Its primary mission is to lobby for equitable access for the Australian public to professional psychological services.