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The nation's peak psychologist body says slashing Medicare's subsidised mental health sessions has forced clinicians to consider leaving the profession, after the Albanese government halved the number of rebated psychology sessions from January 1.

The change, with subsidised sessions dropping from 20 a year to the pre-pandemic maximum of 10, has drawn criticism from psychologists and mental health advocates, who say the cut back leaves patients vulnerable and clinicians overworked.

Australian Association of Psy-

chologists director Tegan Carrison said the Albanese government had disregarded recommendations set out in its own evaluation report, Better Access, which has been interpreted as a sign "the government does not care about or prioritise mental healthcare".

"We're very concerned the egregious decision to slash Medicare-rebated psychology sessions (will) result in psychologists leaving the profession," Ms Carrison said. "We are already experiencing a severe shortage of psychologists, and the loss of even a single psychologist is a massive blow.

"There is an overwhelming sense of hopelessness among psy-

chologists, caught between a sense of loyalty to clients who are in need of ongoing mental health support, and their capacity to make a reasonable living."

In December, Health Minister Mark Butler said the government was scaling back the Better Access program in part because people across the country were not afforded equal access to the 20 sessions. An evaluation of the program found the extra 10 sessions "aggravated existing wait lists" and "barriers to access", he added.

"The evaluation found all of the additional services went to existing patients, and the number of new patients ... able to get into the system and get access to psy-

chology services actually declined by 7 per cent over ... that period."

The AAP's intervention comes less than a month after Suicide Prevention Australia and Mental Health Australia rebuked the government for the cut back, citing preliminary evidence that suicides had increased in NSW and Victoria in 2022.

Ms Carrison said out-of-pocket costs were a major barrier in accessing psychology sessions, with a rebate of about \$89 for services costing up to \$200. She criticised the government for poor timing, saying it could have extended the program for a short period while formulating a "clear path forward".