

MEDIA RELEASE - ADELAIDE

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Six months on, psychology session cuts are taking a serious toll

Cuts to the number of subsidised psychology sessions are taking a serious toll on the mental health of Australians, with some psychologists reducing the number of Medicare-related clients, despite long waiting lists.

Peak body for all psychologists, the Australian Association of Psychologists (AAPi) said in the six months since the Medicare sessions were reduced from 20 to 10, the mental health crisis had not slowed and worryingly, access had not improved, with psychologists reporting their clients are struggling.

Adelaide psychologist and member of AAPi, Jamie Witt, said a number of his clients were unable to progress further or in some cases were going backwards because of a lack of therapeutic intervention.

Mr Witt has two Medicare clients who have needed ongoing support for years who are about to end their 10 sessions and will not likely progress as time goes on, with one he fears may transition back to suicidal ideation.

Dr Heather Mattner, an Adelaide perinatal health psychologist who sees women at the extreme end of postnatal depression, said last year her admission rates were down by 75% as a result of the 20 rebated sessions, but now she is seeing this trend reversing.

“In South Australia, with limited beds available, it is very challenging - and with only 10 sessions a year it is like fighting a monster uphill battle. People working on the frontlines of mental health need assistance, now,” Dr Mattner said.

“While people who suffer from eating disorders can rightfully access 40 rebated sessions a year, we let perinatal women die by suicide in Australia because they cannot access urgently needed frequent mental health support, given there are only 10 Medicare rebated sessions over a year.”

AAPi Executive Director Tegan Carrison said the Federal Government had not provided adequate alternatives since the Better Access psychology sessions were cut.

“The Federal Budget did not even contain a dollar figure for the response to the Better Access evaluation and there has been very little since the government staged the round table in January for relevant mental health bodies,” she said.

“We are inundated with questions from psychologists about what other services are available to support clients who need additional sessions. Unfortunately options outside of Medicare are few and far between.”

Ms Carrison said the recent [report](#) from the AIHW, revealing suicide as the leading cause of death in men and women aged 15 - 44, was terrible evidence of the extent of the mental health crisis around the country.

“Alongside the ongoing cost of living crisis, the situation is not going to improve,” she said.

“We have some practical solutions that, if implemented quickly, would quickly ease the burden. These include a \$150 rebate for all psychologists* and allowing the 8000 provisional psychologists to practice under Medicare.”

Ms Carrison said AAPi was calling on people across the country to write to their Federal MP to express their concern.

“We are asking anyone who cares about the lack of access to mental health care to visit helpushelpmore.com.au and use the email template to write to their MP,” she said.

**Currently there are two different Medicare rebates offered for psychology sessions. This is known as the [two-tier system](#). Clients of clinical psychologists receive around \$136 while clients of registered psychologists receive \$92.*

According to figures from the [Psychology Board of Australia](#), there are 44,365 practicing registered and provisional psychologists, only 26% of whom have clinical endorsement. This means clients being treated by 74% of psychologists are receiving a lower, or no Medicare rebate.

Adelaide mother Bec Dennert experienced post-natal depression after the birth of her first child, who is now three years old.

Bec was suicidal, also diagnosed with Complex PTSD, and in the first 12 months of her daughter’s life, used all 20 Medicare psychology sessions available to her. She also spent some time in hospital during that time.

Bec had her second child a year ago and continues to see Dr Mattner on a regular basis for her mental health, but only has four rebated sessions remaining for the rest of the year.

“I have to go back to my GP and get a mental health plan for the remaining four sessions but if I could choose what I really needed it would be a session every three weeks,” she said.

“I am really struggling with having to space out these four sessions with Dr Mattner now. She is my only means of mental health support and I can’t afford to pay the full fee for additional sessions.”

“I think psychologists need to have more of a say when it comes to dictating how many sessions are needed for each client because everyone is unique.”

Bec said that without those initial 20 sessions, her recovery up to this point would not have been as positive.

“I think they really helped me get through - but the point is, I still need the ongoing support now.”

Bec is now volunteering as part of the onboarding team at [Helen Mayo House](#), where she spent time following the birth of her first child.