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Anger at mental health rebates

EXCLUSIVE

JANE HANSEN

A TWO-TIER rebate system among different groups of psychologists is harming patients at a time when mental health is at crisis point, according to the Australian Association of Psychologists.

Under the Better Access program, which allows patients with a mental disorder to receive up to 10 individual counselling services subsidised by Medicare, patients of clinical psychologists receive a rebate of \$127 for a 50 minute session as opposed to registered psychologists, whose patients receive only \$87.45.

Around 70 per cent of psychologists are registered psychologists. Executive Director, Australian Association of Psychologists Inc. Tegan Carrison said: "Given our current mental health crisis, it is imperative that this issue is addressed and barriers (rebate amount a client receives) to accessing a psychologist are removed." Last week the findings of the Medicare Benefits Schedule Review Taskforce recommended a new committee be established to "urgently" review "access to, and rebates for, Better Access sessions delivered by different professional groups".

Clinical psychologists today are required to hold a Masters degree, however, when the registration system for psychologists moved from a state-based systems to being

federally managed, existing paid members of special interest Colleges of the Australian Psychological Society (APS) were "grandfathered" into the new endorsement system. So some clinical psychologists may not hold a Masters.

"The two tier issue greatly disadvantages clients seeking help from a registered psychologist. A clinical psychologist has an endorsement in psychology based in a clinical setting, like a hospital and a registered psychologist is everyone else that does not have that endorsement," she said. "We don't think there is any difference."

In October the federal government announced an extra \$5.7 billion for mental health and the doubling of support under Better Access.