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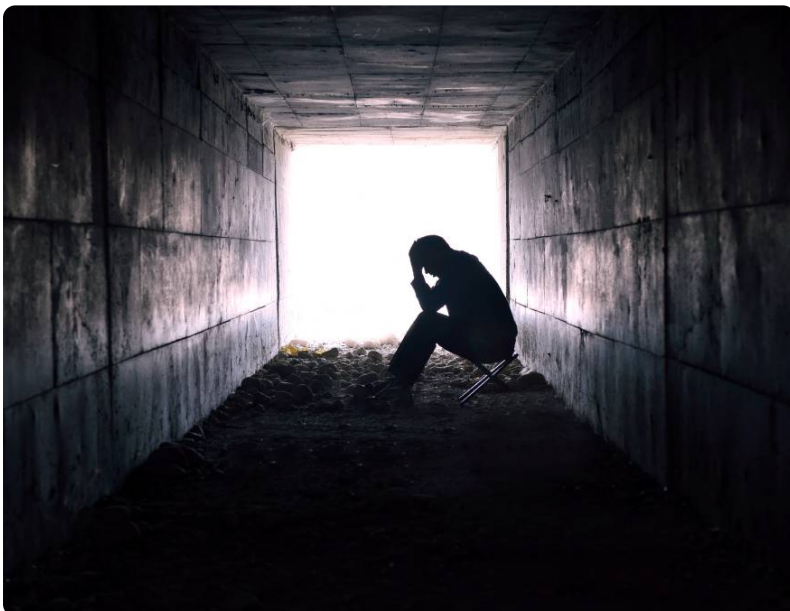
Psychologists call for \$150 Medicare rebate amid mental health crisis



By [Stephanie Dalton](#)


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 The AAPi said in the six months since the Medicare sessions were reduced the mental health crisis had worsened. File picture

Psychologists are calling on the federal government to "take immediate action" to improve mental health services, warning cuts to subsidised psychology sessions are taking a serious toll on the mental health of Australians.

In 2020, the federal government temporarily increased the number of subsidised visits to a psychologist through the Better Access initiative before the initiative was cut in late 2022.

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The Australian Association of Psychologists Inc (AAPi) said in the six months since the Medicare sessions were reduced from 20 to 10, the mental health crisis had worsened, with many psychologists reporting "their clients were

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struggling".

Tasmanian psychologist and member of the AAPi Tracey Martin-Cole said many of her clients were unable to progress further or, in some cases, were going backward because of a lack of therapeutic intervention.

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"Mental ill health or distress in the community is certainly a lot higher than pre-COVID-19," Ms Martin-Cole said.

"The increase in subsidised visits were beneficial for people in terms of relapse prevention and continuity of intervention.

"Cutting these sessions by half has prevented people from receiving adequate care."

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Ms Martin-Cole said the lack of services, particularly in regional areas, would mean vulnerable Tasmanians are being left behind.

"Early intervention and education programs are incredibly valuable in the burgeoning mental health crisis," she said.

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"However, one in five people have already passed that stage but aren't acute enough to warrant emergency mental health services.

"Allowing provisional psychologists, that is, trained psychologists who already have a six-year psychology degree and are completing their supervised practice, to be able to provide Medicare services would not only take the pressure off the acute

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services but the health care system in general."

AAPi executive director Tegan Carrison said the federal government had yet to provide 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," Ms Carrison said.

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"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 Australian Institute of Health and Wellbeing, revealing suicide as the leading cause of death in men and women aged 15 to 44, was terrible evidence of the extent of the mental health crisis around the country.

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"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 allow the 8000 provisional psychologists to practice under

Medicare."

Federal health minister Mark Butler said the Albanese Government is committed to improving the mental health and suicide prevention system for all Australians, with work underway, in consultation with the sector.

"Since the temporary COVID-19 measure ended, tens of thousands more Australians have been able to get in to see a psychologist compared to the same time last year," Mr Butler said.

"Since the additional 10 sessions ceased, in the first three months of 2023, more than 64,000 additional people have received access to Better Access treatment, compared to the same period in 2022.

"We have laid the groundwork for this reform in the Budget, including a \$93.1 million investment in the psychology workforce pipeline."

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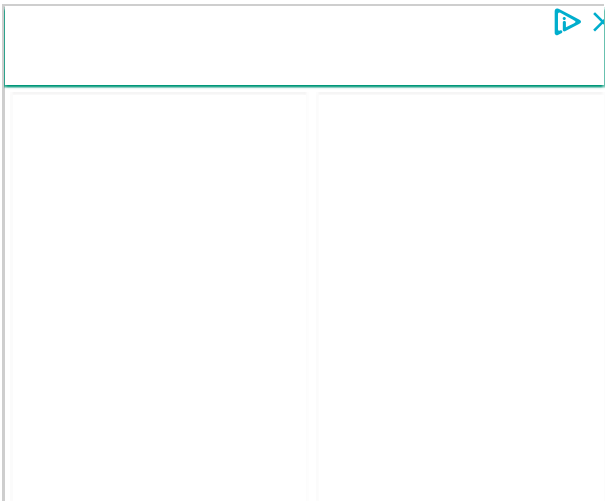
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