

MEDIA RELEASE

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Psychologists stretched as lockdown anxiety peaks

The peak body for psychologists says with demand for anxiety treatment continuing to spike, the time to raise the Medicare rebate and make telehealth permanent is now.

The Australian Association of Psychologists (AAPi) says as Covid-related lockdowns continue and borders stay closed, demand for registered psychologists is at an all-time high.

In a members' survey conducted late last year, 84% of AAPi members reported an increase in anxiety in their clients, and more than 54% had a waiting list of clients they were unable to book in for appointments.

AAPi Executive Director Tegan Carrison said its members were reporting that demand for mental health services was unprecedented.

"Our NSW members in particular, are telling us that they are completely stretched and that the waiting lists are long. Like the major helplines, we are also at crisis point in this pandemic.

"We cannot create a healthier, happier community if psychologists themselves are at breaking point," she said.

Ms Carrison said in the interests of better mental health throughout Australia, the association is asking the Federal Government for the following:

1. **Telehealth** is made a permanent and universal option.
2. Raising of the **Medicare rebate** to \$150 per session(for the client).
3. **40 rebated psychology sessions** allowed per year (this is the Productivity Commission's recommendation)
4. Utilising the **5,500 provisional psychologists** in Australia through a 'provisional psychologist' Medicare rebate, who could be made available immediately.

Melbourne psychologist and AAPi Director Betty Chetcuti said telehealth had become a lifeline for many of her clients.

"One of my clients in South Australia has been seeing me regularly via telehealth and it has been crucial to her recovery - she was suicidal but now she wants to live," she said.

Australian Institute of Health and Welfare data shows that in the four weeks to 25 April 2021, 20% of MBS mental health services were delivered via telehealth.

Ms Carrison said it was a complete no-brainer to make telehealth a standardised model of healthcare.

“Online meetings and working environments have become a regular part of our lives since the pandemic began. Healthcare shouldn’t be any different, and psychology appointments are well suited to online consultations,” she said.

None of the other items on AAPI’s “budget wish-list” have yet been granted and Ms Carrison said its members were growing increasingly frustrated by the situation.

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

About Australian Association of Psychologists Inc (AAPi):

The AAPi is a not-for-profit peak body for 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 funded under the current Medicare Better Access Scheme.

About Tegan Carrison, Executive Director, AAPi:

Tegan has spent over 15 years in public health promotion and is passionate about advocating for the rights of health care professionals and improving access for the community. After studying Nutrition and Health Promotion at Deakin University, Tegan went on to become an experienced clinical educator, supervisor, and mentor, including starting a student-led interprofessional clinic with the University of Queensland’s not-for-profit UQ Health Care. Tegan also brings a wealth of experience in business management, administration and human resource management. She is passionate and dedicated to improving access to mental health services and creating the leading members association for psychologists in Australia.