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**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

## **Psychologists forced to desert veterans' mental health program**

Veterans' mental health will suffer as a result of the discriminatory decision by Open Arms to pay psychologists and clinical psychologists at two different rates.

The Australian Association of Psychologists Inc (AAPi) said the decision had already seen 50 psychologists leave the Open Arms program, with its members expressing concerns about the long-term impacts on veterans.

AAPi Executive Director Tegan Carrison said Open Arms' changes to its schedule of fees were especially worrying for veterans, given the rate of PTSD among veterans was around 8% but additionally because clinical psychologists do not necessarily receive further training in specialised trauma-specific therapies through their tertiary studies.

"This disrespectful decision indicates a strong lack of understanding of the requirements for adequate client care," she said.

"Clinical psychologists do not necessarily have experience with veterans or their families, since such experience is achieved through post-registration training and work experience, *not* a clinical endorsement, while many registered psychologists have the relevant training in trauma.

"This new payment system is based on false assumptions and a lack of evidence, and is discriminatory towards the majority of psychologists.

"One 'type' of psychologist is not superior to another, and there is no evidence that clinical psychologists are better skilled, provide more effective treatment, or have better outcomes than other psychologists."

Under the new fee system with Open Arms, psychologists' fees remain the same while clinical psychologists have been rewarded with a massive 40% increase over the standard fee for what is essentially the same service: \$212 for a 50 to 90-minute in-room consultation, up from \$155.90.

Ms Carrison said this means a brand new clinical graduate with no experience will be entitled to a higher fee for doing exactly the same work as a highly trained and experienced psychologist.

AAPi has received numerous letters from its members expressing disgust and disappointment in the fee decision, with around 50 to date saying they would be departing the Open Arms program. Ms Carrison said she expected this trend to continue unless the fee decision was reversed.

"All psychologists should be valued equally by Open Arms for the immense value and support they provide to the Open Arms community.

"Sadly, this blatant lack of recognition from Open Arms is likely to result in psychologists choosing to support other programs and services, and at the end of the day, it is the veterans who will suffer," she said.

## **Explanatory note on psychologists' qualifications**

All psychologists in Australia must hold general registration, the highest being 'full general registration' with Australian Health Practitioner Regulation Agency (AHPRA). Once registered, some psychologists choose to apply to the Psychology Board of Australia for endorsement in one or more of nine endorsement areas, one of which is 'clinical' endorsement. However, this endorsement does not equate to a medical specialisation. Registered psychologists make up 70% of practitioners in Australia while only 30% have the clinical endorsement.

All registered psychologists must demonstrate competency in diagnosis, assessment, treatment and writing diagnostic reports, regardless of whether they hold a 'clinical' endorsement or not. The quality, skills and knowledge of a psychologist cannot be determined by endorsement status.

## **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.