

MEDIA RELEASE

Victorian Royal Commission Report: a step in the right direction but more is needed.

The Victorian Royal Commission report into mental health should act as a trigger for significant reform on a national scale, according to a peak psychologist body.

The Australian Association of Psychologists (AAPi) says it can offer some solutions to the problems raised within the report but more needs to be done to improve mental health around the country.

AAPi Executive Director Tegan Carrison commended the Victorian Government for its concerted efforts to improve its state mental health system.

“However this report is a reflection of the broken system nationally and should serve as a lesson for the Federal Government.

“We look forward to working with the Victorian Government in implementing the report’s recommendations, in the interests of reducing the burden on psychologists and the community,” she said.

“We believe the overarching issue is access – which is why we need to raise the Medicare rebate for all psychologists to \$150.

“Currently only clinical psychologists - who make up just 30% of all psychologists in Australia - can provide their clients with a higher rebate (\$128.40).

“Extending the higher tier rebate to all registered psychologists increases access to clients by reducing out of pocket expenses.”

Ms Carrison said access could also be improved by reducing red tape - such as making the complex referral system simpler; and allowing clients more sessions to fully recover, with the Productivity Commission recommending up to 40 sessions per year.

“Telehealth needs to be made permanent in order to make psychologists equally accessible around the country, especially in rural and remote areas. And the over-reliance on medication could be addressed by more sessions with a psychologist, which can be provided via telehealth.

“With universal telehealth due to expire at the end of this month - we urgently call on the Federal Government to make telehealth permanently available,” said Ms Carrison.

In response to the report, Ms Carrison also recommended the following improvements needed to be made:

- Family members, carers and supporters needed to be included in funded sessions, over and above individual session allowances.
- There needs to be greater investment in prevention, early intervention and wellbeing. As experts in mental health, registered psychologists are best placed to deliver this.

- Address the supply and demand issue by utilising more than 5000 provisional psychologists. Provisional Psychologists are in the final stages of their training and with supervision, are capable and ready to help but cannot be used effectively if they are not funded appropriately such as through Medicare.
- Private practice psychologists are the most cost-effective way of providing services to our community, but they need to be adequately funded by raising the rebate to \$150 accessible to all clients and all psychologists.

Ms Carrison urged anyone needing support or help to speak with their GP about seeing a Registered Psychologist.

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 healthcare 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.