

MEDIA RELEASE

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Budget wish-list: investment in mental health care is crucial

The peak body for psychologists is calling for greater investment in mental health care in this year's Federal Budget.

The Australian Association of Psychologists (AAPi) says Australia cannot afford another mental health crisis and increased funds must be invested in the interests of a healthier community.

AAPi Executive Director Tegan Carrison said its members, representing registered psychologists, had four key items on its Budget wish list:

1. Making **telehealth** a permanent and universal option.
2. Raising the **Medicare rebate** to \$150 per session.
3. Implementing the Productivity Commission's recommendation to provide up to **40 rebated psychology sessions** per year.
4. Better utilising the **5,500 provisional psychologists** available in Australia through a 'provisional psychologist' Medicare rebate.

"We are hopeful the Federal Government realises what an enormous benefit telehealth is to those in need of a psychologist, recognise it is simply a different delivery method of healthcare, and make it permanent once and for all," Ms Carrison said.

"We are asking for the Medicare rebate to be raised to \$150 per session because, due to a historic legislative mistake, the Medicare system divides psychologists into two different rebate categories: clinical and non-clinical. Australians can only access the higher rebate when seeing clinical psychologists, who represent just 30% of all psychologists.

"This means 70% of psychologists in Australia are placed on a lower Medicare rebate, despite research showing that patients receive the same quality of treatment regardless of whether their psychologist has a 'clinical' label."

Ms Carrison said raising the Medicare rebate to \$150 per session would mean more bulk billed psychologists, more Australians able to afford to stay in treatment for longer, and better retention of psychologists in a profession that has increasingly become financially unviable.

Ms Carrison said implementing the Productivity Commission's recommendation to provide up to 40 rebated psychology sessions per year would help patients complete treatment then engage fully and productively in the community.

"Adequate and consistent treatment will also reduce the pressure on emergency departments and mental health wards of hospitals," she said.

“The current annual cap for psychology sessions sits at 10 sessions (20 sessions are available until June 2022 due to COVID) - which is inadequate.”

Utilising the 5,500 university trained, provisional psychologists available in Australia through a provisional psychologist Medicare rebate would help to provide an affordable option for Medicare rebated services.

“These provisional psychologists are four or five-year trained psychologists, embarking on a final period of supervised practice so readily available to provide mental health care expertise,” Ms Carrison said.

“We are seeing a significant and growing demand for psychologists, so allowing appropriately supervised provisional psychologists to deliver services under Medicare is the quickest and easiest way to bolster the workforce and reduce waiting times. Now is the time to act.

“Australia needs to start flattening the mental health curve urgently. We simply cannot afford another national mental health crisis and its long-term, far reaching effects on our health, economy, society and education,” Ms Carrison said.

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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.