

# MARK KNIGHT

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**TEGAN CARRISON**

## Four ways to mental health fix

**A**S a nation, our mental health has been collectively challenged like never before. The frustration involved in getting help when we really need it is wearing us down and those providing the help are also fed up. A survey of psychologists last year showed 78 per cent of their clients exhibited more distress, anxiety or depression, and 47 per cent were unable to take on new clients. While we're sure to hear plenty about mental health spending on federal budget night, the Australian Association of Psychologists is urging the government to consider four straightforward, achievable and cost-effective recommendations to address the national mental health crisis. **ONE-tier** Medicare rebate for clients of all registered psychologists; **RAISE** the Medicare rebate to \$150 a session to enable more bulk billing and timely treatment; **IMPLEMENT** the Productivity Commission recommendation for up to 40 rebated sessions a year; and **ESTABLISH** a "provisional psychologist" Medicare rebate which would allow about 6400 extra psychologists to provide affordable support to address the overwhelming demand.

A discriminatory Medicare system divides psychologists into two rebate categories: those with clinical endorsement and those without. Clients of registered psychologists are rebated \$88 for a 50-minute session, while clients of clinical psychologists are rebated at \$129 for the same kind of service. Australians can only access the higher rebate when seeing clinical psychologists, who represent just 30 per cent of all psychologists. This means 70 per cent of psychologists are placed on a lower Medicare rebate, despite research showing all psychologists achieve equivalent, excellent treatment outcomes. Most of the government's mental health initiatives to date, like mental health hubs, are based on a reshuffling of an already stretched workforce while not properly addressing a shortage of psychologists. Instead, entire areas of psychological practice are seeing dwindling numbers of graduates. A provisional psychologist rebate would encourage more university places and more psychologists in the future. The two-tier rebate system is also impeding access to mental health services in rural, regional and outer suburban areas. Australia needs to start flattening the mental health curve. We simply cannot afford the far-reaching effects. These four simple solutions would drastically ease the mental health catastrophe. It is no longer looming; it is here and now.

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# Propaganda's grip on many is truly alarming

**G**IVE war a chance. That is the message being attributed to pro-Russian demonstrators in Europe. And there are more of them than you might think.

A few days ago, I was in Thessaloniki in northern Greece, which to me felt very close to the war in Ukraine. I was strolling along the foreshore when I saw a demonstration of several hundred people. This must be an anti-war demonstration against Russia, I immediately thought.

As I came closer, it seemed it might be an anti-Greek government demonstration. Closer still and it was clearly a pro-Russia demo.

I could not believe it. Greece had imposed sanctions on Russia along with EU countries and was accepting thousands of Ukraine refugees, despite the pressure it was under as the favoured entry point of illegal immigrants from wars and economic meltdowns in Syria, Afghanistan, and Lebanon. Greece was also providing arms to Ukraine.

The speeches at the demonstration were visceral and scary. Eyes looked me up and down for any sign that I was not pro-Russia or at least anti-Greek government.

I am now in Cyprus. Cyprus has toed the European line and reluctantly imposed sanctions.

I say reluctantly because Cyprus was one country within the EU that Russia had targeted with massive investments in property and with shell companies to take advantage of low taxes.

Russians now make up about



**THEO THEOPHANOUS**

6 per cent of the Cypriot population and they are its second-largest tourism source after Britain. So it is no wonder that a demonstration outside of the Russian embassy in Nicosia was in fact a pro-Russian demo. They too have been labelled by some of the locals as Cyprus's "Give war a chance" brigade.

I asked myself, how is this all possible? Unlike ordinary Russians, this lot see the images of civilians being killed and the absolute carnage.

So powerful is the Russian propaganda machine that they have convinced many in the West of their narrative. This was brought home to me when I read of the Russian ambassador to Cyprus, Stan Osadchiy, publicly scolding Cyprus and threatening unspecified consequences if it did not remove all sanctions against Russia.

The Russian ambassador's justification of the war was aired widely. It is the line that is parroted by pro-Russian demonstrators: "In this fight against the 'black plague' we are doing everything so that the victims are as few as possible. We do not indiscriminately bomb towns, areas where people live and social infrastructure targets. We do not do

what others have done, flattening entire towns and villages."

The reference to the black plague is a reference to the supposed Nazification of Ukraine – a claim rendered even more bizarre given the Ukraine leader is Jewish.

And the narrative even extends to claims that the Ukrainians staged the bombing of their own schools and hospitals to get world support.

It's absolute garbage, given the real evidence of what is happening in Ukraine and what happened in Syria with Russian help.

So, to those who think the Russian propaganda machine is limited to Russia, think again. Throughout Europe an alternative Russian narrative based on fake news is believed by many.

This fake news is closely aligned with another narrative. It is the narrative successfully prosecuted by Putin that direct military involvement by the West would result in World War III.

The West has been spooked into inaction because of this narrative.

It thus remains impotent on the one thing that would save Ukraine – direct military involvement, or a no-fly zone or even by providing fighter jets from Poland.

Six years ago in Kyiv, the deputy prime minister told me Putin was a great poker player.

He has certainly outplayed the West and is likely at a minimum to get a big chunk of Ukraine.

Putin is probably glad Trump is not President given Trump's recent comments that if he were President, he would bomb Moscow. Putin thinks Biden is weak and that he

won't interfere militarily. Biden has reinforced that very position. He has not even set any red lines that would lead to military action if Russia crossed them.

Putin knows ultimately Russian gas and oil will beat the West's sanctions, especially in a post-war scenario where he has forced Ukraine into a demoralising peace deal that will invariably include its support for removing sanctions.

Putin is an accomplished bully. And like all bullies, only a bigger force standing between them and the little guy will stop them. The small countries in Europe abutting Russia have rushed to become members of NATO. But with success in Ukraine, the Russian bully will once again use the tried and tested threat of Armageddon if the West intervenes to help these countries if Russia invades them.

The West may well regret its cautious "no military intervention" approach. The democratic free world is in a historic fight, to be played out in this century, against autocracy and repression. If democracy allows autocracy to win in Ukraine, other countries will be next, and this will lead invariably to World War III, not stop it.

Now is the time to stop Putin militarily. A defeat may just lead to a change of leadership in Russia and the recommencement of its stalled journey towards democracy and freedom. All it takes is the courage to stand up to a bully.

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