

The Future of Psychology in Australia

A blueprint for better mental health outcomes for all Australians through Medicare



White Paper, June 2019 | **AT A GLANCE**

The APS White Paper: *The Future of Psychology in Australia* is the APS response to the current review of the Medicare Benefits Scheme (MBS).

As psychologists we work every day to improve people’s lives and to benefit the community. We know from the people we help what works for who and when, and how to address the mental health crisis gripping our nation.

The APS White Paper is a blueprint for the Government to improve Medicare and the mental health system to deliver better health outcomes for all Australians.

With it, we are asking Government to strengthen and improve MBS-funded psychological services to:

- Address gaps in the mental health system
- Ensure the highest and best use of psychology and psychologists within our community
- Improve the effectiveness and efficiency of the mental health care system

The White Paper makes 17 recommendations to evolve Medicare to achieve three key outcomes:

- Increase community access to, and affordability of, psychological services in Australia
- Increase treatment and care options for all Australians who have a mental health diagnosis
- Reduce the burden that poor mental health creates for individuals, families, communities, governments and the economy

The White Paper is the foundation for the APS’s advocacy for its members, the profession, and achieving better mental health outcomes for the years to come.

Guiding principles

The APS Board of Directors developed the following principles to guide the MBS consultation process and the development of the White Paper:



Client and outcome focused



Best practice



Client equity and fairness is protected within the system



Stepped care



Cost-effective delivery



Accountability, measurement and evaluation



Simplicity



Flow-on and longer-term impacts

psychology.org.au/blueprint

Recommendations

The APS Position

Psychologists are enabled to provide their full scope of services within Medicare for the benefit of the client.

Recommendation One:

Amend the Better Access Framework

- Separate the psychology workforce from medical and other allied health professionals who provide mental health services as an adjunct to their profession.
- Three levels of mental health interventions are available to clients as follows:
 - a. **Supportive Therapy** provided by medical and other allied health professionals.
 - b. **Psychological Therapy** provided by all psychologists.
 - c. **Advanced Psychological Therapy** provided by psychologists with an Area of Practice Endorsement and who are working within their area of advanced competency, as determined by the Psychology Board of Australia.
- Clients being treated by provisionally registered psychologists are eligible to receive a rebate.

The APS Position

Strengthening the delivery of individual psychological services within Medicare requires a more targeted approach to addressing the burden of mental health in Australia.

Recommendation Two:

Individual psychological services

- Increase the number of available sessions for clients who require more intensive psychological services to stabilise their mental health, prevent deterioration and relapse and to allow the delivery of evidence-based interventions that support recovery.
- Clients are stepped through levels of psychological care according to the:
 - nature of the mental health disorder
 - expertise of the psychologist
 - needs of the client (number of sessions required to achieve effective clinical outcomes; up to 20 sessions for low intensity treatment needs and up to 40 for clients with specific diagnoses and high intensity treatment needs).
- Regularly measure and review outcomes to determine treatment progress and to ensure responsiveness is embedded in the delivery of psychological services within Medicare.
- Clients can be referred to a psychologist by any medical practitioner registered with the Australian Health Practitioners Regulation Agency.
- Collaborative care is supported by strengthened reporting, enhanced referrals, integrating outcome measurement, and by implementing criteria to clarify clinical care pathways.

The APS Position

Psychologists play an integral role to support family groups and couples and enhance the quality of relationships and the emotional, psychological and physical safety of families and couples where mental health problems are involved.

Recommendation Three:

Family and couples therapy

Introduce items for family and couple therapy where one or more members of the family/couple are experiencing mental health problems.

The APS Position

Current restrictions in the use of group therapy items within Medicare are a barrier to access to these services. Improving access to group therapy will allow for more effective treatment for a range of people and diverse groups.

Recommendation Four:

Amend group therapy items

Amend group therapy items within Medicare by:

- reducing the minimum participant numbers and increasing the maximum number of participants
- enabling group therapy for kinship groups
- enabling two clinicians to facilitate a group therapy program
- increasing the range of timed items to allow for flexible group therapy and longer sessions.

Recommendations

<p>The APS Position</p> <p>The effectiveness of treatment for children experiencing a mental health disorder is significantly enhanced when parents and carers are involved in the treatment process.</p>	<p>Recommendation Five: Evidence-based interventions for parents and carers of children with a mental health disorder</p> <p>Introduce an item for the specific purpose of providing evidence-based interventions between health professionals and family, parents, carers and/or support people of children or adolescents with a mental health disorder.</p>
<p>The APS Position</p> <p>Comprehensive developmental neurocognitive assessments are essential to improve diagnostic accuracy of a mental health condition and enable interventions, including the functional impacts of the neurocognitive problems, to be appropriately tailored and targeted.</p>	<p>Recommendation Six: Developmental neurocognitive assessments</p> <p>Introduce items that enable clients to access comprehensive developmental neurocognitive assessments to accurately delineate the impact of cognitive, behavioural and psychosocial issues that are associated with neurodevelopmental problems and to improve diagnostic accuracy and client outcomes, especially among children.</p>
<p>The APS Position</p> <p>Evaluation and outcome measurement is an integral component of mental health service systems to monitor and improve services and ensure investment is targeted and outcomes achieved.</p>	<p>Recommendation Seven: Standardised evaluation and measurement for the delivery of psychological services</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Invest in the collection of data, including outcome data, within the Better Access initiative.• Introduce standardised evaluation into the Medicare Benefits Scheme and that the APS be consulted and work with the Government to assist with the development of appropriate tools.
<p>The APS Position</p> <p>Neuropsychological assessment to differentiate dementia from mental health disorders</p>	<p>Recommendation Eight: Neuropsychological assessment to differentiate dementia from mental health disorders</p> <p>Introduce items to allow a comprehensive neuropsychological assessment for people with potential neurocognitive problems/dementia who are at increased risk of a mental health disorder, or who may have a co-occurring mental health condition.</p>
<p>The APS Position</p> <p>The treatment of specific populations (e.g., children, people with an intellectual disability, older people) and mental health problems (i.e., psychotic disorders) is enhanced when there are sessions with family, parents, carers and other support people.</p>	<p>Recommendation Nine: Consultation with family, parents, carers and support people</p> <p>Introduce an item for the specific purpose of enabling consultation between health professionals and family, parents, carers and/or support people.</p>
<p>The APS Position</p> <p>Case conferencing with other health professionals enhances clinical care; aligns with the evidence-base, and supports multidisciplinary collaboration for the benefit of the client.</p>	<p>Recommendation Ten: Mental health case conferencing with other health professionals</p> <p>Introduce items to enable psychologists to be included in case conferencing with other health professionals involved in the client's care.</p>
<p>The APS Position</p> <p>Psychologists play an integral role in facilitating appropriate access to, and measuring the effectiveness of, low intensity e-Mental health services.</p>	<p>Recommendation Eleven: e-Mental health assessments</p> <p>Introduce two items for clients with low intensity treatment needs to assess suitability for and facilitate access to e-mental health programs and to assess the clients response to these intervention programs.</p>

Recommendations

The APS Position

Assessments and reports are essential to ensuring treatments are targeted; the client has been appropriately referred, and the referring practitioner and treating team have up to date information. This is important to assist in making informed decisions about the client's health, including mental health.

Recommendation Twelve:

Initial intake, assessment and report item

Introduce items to conduct an initial assessment of a client presenting for treatment with a psychologist. This includes preparing a report for the referring practitioner to enhance collaborative care arrangements.

The APS Position

Interpreter services are necessary and important to facilitate universal access to psychologists within Medicare.

Recommendation Thirteen:

Universal access to Interpreters

Expand access to free interpreter services currently available for medical consultations within Medicare to psychological services delivered under Medicare.

The APS Position

Improve the flexibility of telehealth items.

Recommendation Fourteen:

Amend telehealth items

Expand access to telehealth for clients in metropolitan areas who face barriers to attending face-to-face psychological therapy and removing barriers to access for people in regional, rural and remote areas of Australia.

The APS Position

Access to psychologists for people who live in regional, rural and remote areas of Australia requires more targeted reform within Medicare.

Recommendation Fifteen:

Enhance access to psychological services for people in regional, rural and remote Australia

Introduce financial incentives, such as rural loadings, to improve the financial viability of providing psychological services to people who live in regional, rural and remote areas of Australia.

The APS Position

Independent mental health assessments provide practitioners with an opportunity to obtain another opinion about the best course of treatment for the benefit of the client.

Recommendation Sixteen:

Independent mental health assessment, opinion and report

Introduce items to refer clients for an assessment, expert opinion and report to psychologists with an Area of Practice Endorsement in clinical or counselling psychology.

The APS Position

Diversity of psychological expertise benefits the long-term mental health of Australians. Improvements to the Medicare Benefits Schedule are required to ensure clients are able to access the right care at the right time.

Recommendation Seventeen:

Scheduled fees

- The Government continue with the current two-level rebate system within Medicare.
- Extend the higher rebate to all psychologists who hold an Area of Practice Endorsement.
- Increase the scheduled fees for psychological therapy services.
- Increase the scheduled fees for assessment items to 1.5 times the scheduled fee for individual treatment.