

## MEDIA RELEASE

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### **Urgent reversal of cuts to Better Access mental health initiative essential**

Too many Australians with moderate to severe mental health problems will be left without appropriate psychological treatment unless cuts to the Better Access to Mental Health Care Initiative are urgently reversed as recommended in yesterday's report from a Senate Inquiry into mental health funding, according to the Australian Psychological Society.

Budget changes to Medicare funding for mental health services – which came into effect yesterday – mean consumers with moderate to severe mental health problems will be entitled to just 10 sessions with a psychologist or other mental health care professional in a year, down from the previous 18 sessions.

But following an inquiry that attracted over 1,100 submissions, the Senate Committee has called for these changes to be delayed because other programs are not currently able to accommodate the estimated 87,000 Australians per year who need more effective treatment to address severe or complex mental health problems.

The Senate Inquiry has, among its key recommendations, called for an interim program to allow these people to access additional sessions of psychological care until alternative programs, such as Access to Allied Psychological Services (ATAPS), are shown to be adequately equipped to meet their needs.

But Professor Lyn Littlefield, Executive Director of the Australian Psychological Society, said that ATAPS funding was now being diverted away from the provision of treatment. The full reinstatement of the highly successful Better Access is now essential to prevent people with severe or complex problems whose treatment is compromised by the funding cuts from falling through the gap.

She said: "The worrying gap in services which was highlighted in the Senate Inquiry report, was clearly revealed in Australian Psychological Society research in June. This showed that those people who needed the additional sessions of psychological treatment overwhelmingly had moderate to severe mental health disorders involving anxiety and depression. These consumers – whose needs will not be met by other services – were receiving effective treatment through the Better Access initiative, with close to half having no residual symptoms or only a mild presentation at the end of the more extensive treatment and just 3 per cent retaining a severe presentation."

Professor Littlefield said: "We welcome the report of the Senate Inquiry into mental health funding and congratulate the Senate Committee on taking the time and effort to consult with the community. The overwhelming response shows how important Better Access is to Australians and we support the Committee's call for an urgent rethink."

**- Ends-**

**Notes to editors:** The Senate's Community Affairs References Committee Inquiry into Commonwealth Funding and Administration of Mental Health Services is at [www.aph.gov.au/Senate/committee/index.htm](http://www.aph.gov.au/Senate/committee/index.htm).

**More information is at [www.psychology.org.au/Content.aspx?ID=3734](http://www.psychology.org.au/Content.aspx?ID=3734). For media enquiries contact Judith Heywood on 03 8662 3301 or Karen Coghlan on 03 8662 6638 or [media@psychology.org.au](mailto:media@psychology.org.au).**

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