

MEDIA RELEASE
30 July 2007



Psychologist Medicare initiative hits the spot!

The Australian Psychological Society (APS) has hailed the federal government's Medicare rebate scheme for psychological services as an outstanding success in all aspects, including increased provision of psychological services in regional and rural Australia at an affordable cost.

A survey of hundreds of clinical psychologists eligible for the Medicare rebate around Australia has found that around a quarter (24%) are providing Medicare funded services outside the metropolitan areas. This compares favourably with the percentage of people living in regional/rural Australia. In addition, two thirds (66%) of the clinical psychologists surveyed reported that they are bulk billing patients in financial need.

Further findings indicate that of the clinical psychologists working under Medicare, over 75% have been charging less than \$140 for their total hour-long service. Over 90% charge less than \$150. The most striking finding was the fact that clinical psychologists were charging an average fee of \$133. This is only \$4 over the Medicare Benefits Schedule (MBS) fee.

"The results of this survey support what we had come to believe - that many members of the community with a significant mental health need are now able to access the services of clinical psychologists," said APS Executive Director, Prof Lyn Littlefield. "A number of the group surveyed are bulk billing all patients with mental health disorders as they are committed to increasing access to services by people with these debilitating disorders," said Littlefield. "Claims that clinical psychologists are charging rates that leave patients more than \$80 out of pocket are certainly not supported by the evidence of the survey."

The survey has been extended to examine the practices of other registered psychologists providing services under the new Medicare items. The preliminary data suggests that they too are keeping their fees well down, bulk billing and providing extensive services outside the metropolitan area.

"It is clear that the government's aim to provide better access to mental health care is certainly being met by the majority of services being provided by psychologists across Australia," said Littlefield.

The APS is the largest professional association for psychologists in Australia, representing more than 15,700 members. The APS is committed to advancing psychology as a discipline and profession. It spreads the message that psychologists make a difference to peoples' lives, through improving psychological knowledge and community wellbeing.

Prof Lyn Littlefield is available for interview. Please contact:
Elaine Grant
Communications Manager
Australian Psychological Society
T: 03 8662 3363 | M: 0412 683 068