



Australian Government

Department of Health and Ageing

Better Access to Psychiatrists, Psychologists and General Practitioners through the Medicare Benefits Schedule (Better Access) initiative

I am writing to advise you about the two Better Access measures announced as part of the 2009 Budget. These measures aim to improve targeting of primary mental health services to those most in need, provide better quality mental health services and ensure patients receive high quality services appropriate to their needs.

1. Medicare Benefits Schedule - Better Access Initiative - improved targeting for the most in need and better quality of services

As indicated in the Budget papers, this measure will apply from 1 July 2009. It consists of three elements:

1. requiring that GPs document a diagnosis of a mental disorder in the Plan;
2. changing the name of the "GP Mental Health Care Plan" to "GP Mental Health Treatment Plan" to better reflect what it is intended to do; and
3. the introduction of a new Medicare item for GPs who have not completed level 1 mental health skills training.

The first two components will apply from 1 July 2009. The third component will be implemented from 1 January 2010 to allow sufficient time for GPs to undertake the training.

It is important to note that those GPs who have not completed the training will still be able to refer patients to allied mental health professionals as per current arrangements so that patients requiring these services will not be disadvantaged.

2. Medicare Benefits Schedule - Better Access Initiative - continuing professional development.

This measure will introduce mandatory continuing professional development (CPD) requirements for general psychologists and appropriately trained social workers and occupational therapists providing Focussed Psychological Strategies services under the Better Access initiative.

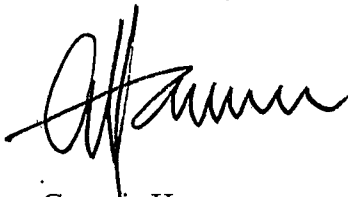
The mandatory CPD measure will provide a quality assurance mechanism that services provided under the Better Access initiative are delivered by highly qualified practitioners who have maintained their clinical skills and knowledge base.

These Budget measures are complementary and aim to strengthen the quality and effectiveness of the Better Access program.

The Department is currently working on the implementation of both measures and will consult with the relevant professional groups to inform this process. Further detail about these initiatives will be provided in the near future.

If you would like to discuss the Budget measures or require further information on the Better Access initiative, please do not hesitate to contact Virginia Hart, Assistant Secretary, Mental Health Reform Branch on (02) 6289 7343 or e-mail: virginia.hart@health.gov.au

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'G Harman', written in a cursive style.

Georgie Harman
A/g First Assistant Secretary
Mental Health and Chronic Disease Division

22 May 2009