



Australian Government
Department of Health and Ageing

FACT SHEET

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

ALLIED MENTAL HEALTH SERVICES UNDER THE BETTER ACCESS INITIATIVE: 2011-12 BUDGET MEASURE

Background to the Budget Measure

The 2011-12 Budget included changes to the allied mental health services available under the Better Access initiative. An outline of this budget measure was provided in a previous fact sheet circulated in May 2011, which can be found at:

<http://www.health.gov.au/internet/budget/publishing.nsf/Content/budget2011-factsheet01.htm>

This Fact Sheet contains more detailed information on these changes and includes Frequently Asked Questions.

Key Points:

- Under the Better Access initiative MBS items provide Medicare benefits for allied mental health services including psychological therapy services (items 80000 to 80020) provided by eligible clinical psychologists and focussed psychological strategies services (items 80100 to 80170) provided by eligible psychologists, occupational therapists and social workers.
- Prior to 31 October 2011, patients receiving services under Better Access are able to access up to 12 individual services and/or up to 12 group services. In exceptional circumstances patients can access an additional six individual services prior to 31 October 2011. In accordance with the Medicare Benefits Schedule, exceptional circumstances are defined as a significant change in the patient's clinical condition or care circumstances which make it appropriate and necessary to increase the number of services. It is up to the referring practitioner to determine that the patient meets the requirements for exceptional circumstances.
- From 1 November 2011, Medicare rebates for eligible people with a diagnosed mental disorder under the Better Access initiative will be capped at 10 individual allied mental health services per calendar year, from 12. Individuals may also be referred for up to 10 group services per calendar year in addition to their individual allied mental health services.
- Individuals who have already accessed 10 or more individual and/or 10 or more group services by 1 November 2011 will not be eligible for additional services until 1 January 2012.

FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS ON THE CHANGES TO THE ALLIED MENTAL HEALTH SERVICES UNDER THE BETTER ACCESS INITIATIVE

Q: I have seen a psychologist for 12 services of psychological therapy this year under the Better Access initiative. Am I able to access any more services from 1 November 2011?

A: Individuals who have already accessed 10 or more individual and/or 10 or more group MBS rebateable allied mental health services by 1 November 2011 will not be eligible for additional MBS rebateable services until 1 January 2012.

Your psychologist can continue to provide services to you but these psychological therapy services will not attract a MBS rebate under the Better Access initiative.

Q: How many Better Access individual allied mental health services can I access in 2011 under Medicare if I have already received six services?

A: From 1 November 2011 Medicare rebates for eligible patients under the Better Access initiative will be capped at 10 individual allied mental health services per calendar year.

You may also be referred for up to 10 group services per calendar year in addition to your 10 individual allied mental health services.

As you have received six services, you can be referred for a further four MBS rebateable individual allied mental health services (ie. up to a total of 10).

Q: How many allied mental health services can I access from 1 January 2012?

A: Medicare rebates are available for up to 10 individual allied mental health services in a calendar year. A calendar year is defined as the period of time between 1 January and 31 December. The 10 services may consist of: GP focussed psychological strategies services (items 2721 to 2727); and/or psychological therapy services (items 80000 to 80015); and/or focussed psychological strategies – allied mental health services (items 80100 to 80115; 80125 to 80140; 80150 to 80165).

In addition to individual services, patients may also be eligible for referral for up to 10 separate group therapy services within a calendar year.

Q: What do I do if I need more than 10 allied mental health services?

A: The Better Access initiative was introduced to address low treatment rates for high prevalence mental disorders such as depression and anxiety – particularly presentations of mild to moderate severity where short-term evidence-based interventions are most likely to be useful.

While some people with more complex or intensive care needs may benefit from psychological interventions under Better Access, the initiative was not designed to provide intensive, ongoing therapy for people with severe, ongoing illness.

It is important that people get the right care for their needs. People who currently receive more than 10 allied mental health services under Better Access are likely to be patients with more complex needs and would be better suited for referral to more appropriate mental health services. GPs can continue to refer those people with more severe ongoing mental disorders to Medicare subsidised consultant psychiatrist services or state/territory specialised mental health services.

To help make psychiatrist services available in more areas, from 1 July 2011 the Government is providing new Medicare rebates for video psychiatrist consultations for patients living in regional, remote and outer metropolitan areas. GPs, specialists and other health professionals will be provided with financial incentives to help deliver these online services and funding will also be provided to support training and supervision for health professionals.

Further information

For more detailed information about MBS items descriptors and explanatory notes visit the Department of Health and Ageing's 'MBS Online' website at www.mbsonline.gov.au .

Information regarding eligibility, claiming and payment processes can be obtained from Medicare Australia on 132 150 (providers) or 132 011 (patients) or by visiting www.medicareaustralia.gov.au.

Information on the GP Mental Health Treatment Plan items and the allied mental health items is also available on the Department's website <http://www.health.gov.au/internet/main/publishing.nsf/Content/mental-ba>

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