

THE PSYCHOLOGY FOUNDATION OF AUSTRALIA

(Incorporated in New South Wales)

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8 February 2010

Dear Dr Arcus,

The Psychology Foundation of Australia is a grouping of research-oriented university Schools of Psychology that was created to promote high standards in the education of psychologists and a scientific basis for professional practice.

The recent introduction of national registration, as well as media discussion of psychological services, have prompted us to seek a meeting with the Department of Health and Ageing to express our views on the training, registration and employment of psychologists.

Our starting point is that the goal of mental health services should be to **deliver the most effective treatments to those who need them most.**

In terms of workforce training and registration, this goal points to the need for **evidence-based** assessment and treatment.

In terms of mental health services, this goal points to the need to maximise the **availability** of effective services to the community.

Unfortunately, the current system of training, registration and deployment of psychologists does not meet either of these requirements adequately. Too few Australians with mental health needs are able to access any services at all, and of those who do access services, too few receive effective, evidence-based treatment delivered by appropriately trained practitioners.

The main **problems**, as we see them, are as follows:

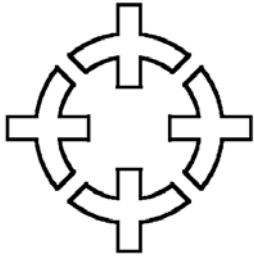
1. Current registration standards are well below relevant international standards. They allow psychological services to be delivered by practitioners who have not been adequately trained in evidence-based assessment and treatment, in particular those with only 4 years of university training. The 4-year undergraduate degree provide excellent training in the discipline, methods and conceptual basis of psychology, but it does not provide professional, vocational training. In Australia, as in the rest of the world, professional training is provided at the postgraduate level, building on the foundation provided by the undergraduate degree.
2. The provision of Medicare rebates for services provided by 4-year trained psychologists is inefficient because many of these services are not evidence-based. Medicare support has also encouraged psychologists to set up in private practice, where they tend to provide therapy for clients in socioeconomically advantaged areas, with on average less severe problems. At the same time there has been an exodus of well-trained psychologists from the public sector.
3. In 2004 the Commonwealth reduced funding for postgraduate professional training programs in universities by almost 60%. These programs are highly efficient and focus on evidence-based professional practice, but at the current funding level universities are running them at a loss and cannot expand their intakes.

We suggest a coordinated, revenue-neutral **solution** to these problems, as follows:

1. Increase the requirements for registration to 6 years of university training, in line with

OFFICE ENQUIRIES

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international standards.

2. Reduce Medicare funding for private practice, and use this funding to support salaried positions in the public sector, located in areas of greatest need. Specifically, we suggest that Medicare rebates for 4-year trained psychologists be phased out, with an appropriate sunset period and opportunity for practitioners to upgrade their qualifications.

3. Restore the pre-2004 level of funding for postgraduate professional courses in psychology, to allow universities to expand their intakes to compensate for the phasing-out of registration for 4-year graduates.

We would appreciate the opportunity to discuss our proposal and to help maximise the contribution of psychology to mental health in Australia.

Yours sincerely

David Badcock

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