

BEING Surveys – Medicare Subsidised Visits – Jan 2023

Background

Mark Butler, federal Minister for Mental Health announced on 11th December 2022 that, following the latest report on the Better Access Initiative, the government would reduce the number of Medicare-subsidised mental health visits from 20 (set in response to the Covid pandemic) back to its historical level of 10 p.a.

BEING surveyed its members to understand what mental health consumers thought of this decision and how it would impact them.

We received a total of 108 responses from NSW consumers. 65% of respondents are working (either full or part time) and represent an even spread of HH income from <\$20k to >\$150k.

Results

- Gap Payments
 - The mode gap payment for mental health services is \$50-\$99 per visit
- Appointments
 - The most frequently visited professionals are psychologists with 57% of respondents visiting at least once/fortnight
- “How helpful do you find the different aspects of your mental health therapy?” (“Very Helpful,” “Somewhat helpful.”)
 - “Talking to someone who doesn’t judge me/my thoughts (84%, 9%)
 - “Talking to someone who shows empathy.” (79%, 16%)
 - “Talking to someone I trust and can open up to.” (73%, 21%)
- “Which of the following are either a major barrier, or somewhat of a barrier, to receiving the treatment you need?”
 - limited number of subsidised appointments (91%)
 - gap payment/cost (89%)
 - finding a provider who has time to see new patients (83%)
 - finding a provider with the necessary experience (82%)
 - finding a provider who is close enough to where I live (67%)
- “Which of the following best describes your experience?”
 - Able to cope on their own after 10 or fewer sessions (12%)
 - Still needed help after 10 so paid the full amount themselves (33%)
 - Still needed help but couldn’t afford to continue so stopped (40%)

- Main reason you stopped therapy?
 - I couldn't afford to pay anymore (54%)
 - I got better (15%)
 - I ran out of subsidised appointments (10%)
 - It wasn't helping (10%)
 - My therapist lived too far away to be convenient (7%)
 - I got fed up waiting to be seen (5%)

What is your biggest complaint about the mental health services available to you? (Qual.)

"Very limited services. To see a psychiatrist have to travel hours as none have books open. The cost is unaffordable especially when on low income."

"The 6 month waiting list for any psychiatrist, plus the recommended fee of \$750 for a one hour session with only \$250 rebate is not enough. There are no bulk billing psychiatrists available for those with a healthcare card."

"Although I was in crisis, it took months to see a psychiatrist, and 8 months to access a psychiatrist with specific experience in my comorbidities."

"The availability of bulk billing psychiatrists is a travesty. There are many people barely able to maintain themselves due to lack of treatment as they have little or no funds available."

"The medical centre where my GP works do not bulk-bill concessions anymore either, therefore I avoid going to see my GP."

"Honestly the waiting lists are ridiculous, if you are being referred to this kind of service, you need help sooner rather than later."

"Cost too much. Some people with mental health problems like me can't work full time and I can't afford to see a psychologist unless I get the rebate."

"It is very difficult & expensive to find support in rural areas, long waiting lists, and lack of specialist care e.g. eating disorders."

Key takeaways

- 80-90% of consumers say that cost, access and experience are obstacles to getting the therapy they need
- 70% said 10 sessions were insufficient
- 54% of consumers stopped treatment because they couldn't afford to continue