

CONTINUED PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT REQUIREMENTS FOR PROVIDERS OF FOCUSED PSYCHOLOGICAL STRATEGIES SERVICES UNDER THE BETTER ACCESS TO PSYCHIATRISTS, PSYCHOLOGISTS AND GENERAL PRACTITIONERS THROUGH THE MEDICARE SCHEDULE (BETTER ACCEESS) INITIATIVE

1. Better Access Initiative

The Better Access to Psychiatrists, Psychologists and General Practitioners through the Medicare Benefits Schedule (Better Access) initiative includes a range of Medicare rebateable services for eligible people with a diagnosed mental disorder, including evidence based psychological interventions provided by GPs, clinical psychologists, registered psychologists and appropriately trained social workers and occupational therapists.

Psychiatrists, paediatricians and GPs can refer patients with a diagnosable mental disorder for intensive, short-term Medicare-subsidised mental health services.

Medicare rebates are available for eligible people for up to 12 individual and up to 12 group allied mental health services per calendar year for psychological therapy or focussed psychological strategies (FPS) services. In exceptional circumstances an additional individual six services may be accessed.

2. Continued Professional Development (CPD) and Current Arrangements

There is a wide variation in the backgrounds and level of competence across and within all of the professional groups delivering psychological interventions to address mental health issues.

The Australian Government announced as part of the 2009-10 Budget that from 1 July 2011 all registered psychologists, social workers and occupational therapists will need to meet mandatory CPD requirements to continue to be able to access the Medicare Benefits Schedule (MBS) items when providing FPS services under the Better Access initiative.

This measure is designed to ensure that mandatory CPD standards for general allied health professionals align with similar programs, and that Government funding supports best practice standards. It promotes good clinical practice for the large number of Medicare registered Better Access providers, and is an important step to ensure Commonwealth-funded mental health services are of a suitably high quality.

Each profession (the Australian Psychological Society, the Australian Association of Social Workers and OT Australia) has its own arrangements in place in relation to CPD requirements of their members. These arrangements will continue and will be supplemented by specific CPD requirements in relation to the provision of FPS services under Medicare.

The Budget measure is designed to ensure that accredited CPD activities become uniform across each profession so that there is consistency in the quality of services provided by all providers of FPS services and the CPD activities meet the needs of all professions.

All allied mental health professionals will continue to be able to provide FPS and other psychological services to their clients outside of Medicare if they do not wish to meet the new CPD requirements.

3. Scope and attributes of CPD requirements

Recognising that allied mental health professionals provide a range of psychological services, as a minimum the new mental health CPD requirements will include 20 hours of FPS related CPD activities over a two year CPD cycle. The cycle would run for two years from 1 July to 30 June.

For the purposes of accessing Medicare rebates, the CPD will only cover training for delivering evidence-based therapies such as Cognitive Behaviour Therapy (CBT) and interpersonal therapy.

A range of acceptable strategies has been approved for use by allied mental health professionals utilising the FPS items. These are:

- 1. Psycho-education** (including motivational interviewing)
- 2. Cognitive-behavioural Therapy including:**
 - Behavioural interventions
 - Behaviour modification
 - Exposure techniques
 - Activity scheduling

Cognitive interventions

 - Cognitive therapy
- 3. Relaxation Strategies**
 - Progressive muscle relaxation
 - Controlled breathing
- 4. Skills training**
 - Problem solving skills and training
 - Anger management
 - Social skills training
 - Communication training
 - Stress management
 - Parent management training
- 5. Interpersonal therapy** (especially for depression)

There is also flexibility to include narrative therapy for clients of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander descent.

In addition to CPD activities to enable delivery of quality treatments listed above, it is important that practitioners have the required skills to undertake a full assessment of the patient in order to form a diagnosis and commence treatment planning. CPD in these clinical skills will also count towards the minimum CPD requirements. Given that the disorders that can be treated under the Better Access initiative are ICD 10 disorders, relevant training in psychopathology of these disorders will also count towards CPD requirements.

Furthermore, there is flexibility in the CPD activities that can be undertaken to meet individual professional needs and their practice/client base and client needs. For example, activities could also include assessment and treatment of specific disorders and client types such as youth, or different modalities and delivery such as working with groups.

CPD activities will continue to be accredited by each profession and accredited FPS and CBT CPD activities could include: formal postgraduate university programs, workshops, seminars and lectures.

Other activities which may be included as part of the required 20 hours FPS related CPD but will not be accredited include: journal reading/discussion/assessment, giving lectures/talks, writing papers, receipt of supervision and peer consultation in these FPS related areas, and on-line activities (except those which meet accreditation guidelines).

4. Accreditation of CPD activities

Each profession will continue to accredit CPD activities on a consistent basis across all the professions.

The criteria for accrediting CPD activities requires the activity to be educational, evidence-based, presented by a suitably credentialled presenter and involves assessment and having educational aims.

5. Monitoring of CPD requirements and advice to Medicare Australia

Current arrangements for the recording of CPD activities occur in a self-report format, with members providing information on their CPD activities through the use of either hard copy or on-line log sheets. Under current arrangements the onus is on participants to maintain their own records of CPD participation and provide these to their relevant association as requested. The associations undertake a random audit of submitted log sheets.

These arrangements will continue. Each professional organisation will develop a log sheet to specifically record FPS CPD activities for their profession and the core requirements will be consistent across all professions. There will continue to be an ongoing auditing of providers' CPD activities with Medicare FPS providers required to retain proof of participation in all FPS related CPD activities in order to satisfy audit requirements.

Individual providers will be required to submit their log sheets to their professional organisation by 31 July 2011 and at least every two subsequent years to be assessed for ongoing eligibility under the Better Access initiative and for their organisation to advise Medicare Australia on their eligibility status.

Each organisation will advise Medicare Australia at the end of August of those providers who have not met the FPS related CPD requirements and hence are no longer eligible providers under the Better Access initiative.

In early September, Medicare Australia will send a letter to those providers who have not met the eligibility criteria and unless they take immediate remedial action they will be removed from the eligible provider list within 28 days.

CPD requirements count from the time the provider is registered with Medicare Australia, or from 1 July 2009, whichever is the later. Part-time providers are required to have 20 hours of FPS related CPD, the same as full-time providers. Providers who are removed from the approved provider list by Medicare Australia can be placed back on the list once they meet the FPS related CPD requirements for the previous cycle (total of 20 hours) and will be required to meet the requirements for the new cycle in full by 30 June of the new cycle.

6. Promotion of new CPD requirements, available activities and providers

The new FPS related CPD requirements will be available on the Department of Health and Ageing website as well as on the website of each professional association. The Departmental website will include links to professional associations.

Each organisation will promote the new FPS related CPD requirements to members through for example: personal presentations, editorials, national bulletins, e-bulletins and information in association's journals, and through direct e-mail or communication with individual members. These will also be promoted at various conferences.

7. Support for rural and remote providers

It is recognised that rural and remote providers of FPS may have difficulties in accessing CPD activities and hence in meeting the new CPD requirements. Accredited CPD activities may include the use and development of on-line courses in order to reach people in remote locations and to link them with each other in support groups and peer consultation networks.

If you have any queries, please contact Bernadette Blenkiron in the Department of Health and Ageing on (02) 6289 8826 or: bernadette.blenkiron@health.gov.au

Department of Health and Ageing
November 2009