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Department of Health and Ageing

Better Access initiative Evaluation and Mental Health Services in Rural and Remote Australia Program

**Social workers and occupational therapists
forum - 24 June 2010**

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



Evaluation of the Better Access initiative

- A full evaluation of the Better Access initiative commenced in January 2009 and will be completed in late 2010.
- The purpose of the evaluation is to assess the overall appropriateness, effectiveness and impact of the initiative.



Evaluation components

- The evaluation consists of the following 4 components:
 - Component A – A consumer outcomes study to provide information on the outcomes of individual patient care;
 - Component B – An analysis of Medicare Benefits Schedule (MBS) and Pharmaceutical Benefits Scheme (PBS) data focussing on access, affordability and the level and mix of service use, including services provided by social workers and occupational therapists;
 - Component C – An analysis of supply and distribution of the allied mental health workforce, including social workers and occupational therapists; and
 - Component D – Consultation with stakeholders focussing on stakeholders' experiences and perceptions with regard to the effectiveness and appropriateness of the initiative. Social workers and occupational therapists were among the stakeholders consulted.
- Findings of the above components will be drawn together into an overall summative evaluation report.



Evaluation of the Better Access initiative Project Steering Committee

- The Evaluation Project Steering Committee comprises people with specific expertise and knowledge of mental health issues and program evaluation.
- Ms Kandie Allen-Kelly and Mr Ron Hunt have been appointed to the Committee.



Medicare Services provided

- The Department's analysis of Medicare data indicates that since the introduction of the Better Access initiative in November 2006, over 12.8 million Medicare subsidised services have been provided to over 2.1 million people.



Medicare Services provided cont..

- At 30 April 2010 the following services had been subsidised through Medicare.
 - Around 1.9 million General Practitioner Mental Health Treatment Plan items;
 - Around 2.6 million Psychological Therapy Services (provided by clinical psychologists); and
 - More than 5.1 million Focussed Psychological Strategies services (provided by registered psychologists, occupational therapists and social workers).



Services provided by social workers and occupational therapists

- There are currently around 1,200 social workers registered with Medicare Australia to provide Better Access services. To date they have provided around 345,000 services under the Better Access initiative.
- There are currently around 320 occupational therapists registered with Medicare Australia to provide Better Access services. To date they have provided around 71,000 services under the Better Access initiative.



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Mental Health Services in Rural and Remote Areas Program



Aim

- The Mental Health Services in Rural and Remote Areas program provides allied and nursing mental health services in rural and remote communities where access to Medicare subsidised mental health services is low.
- Funding is provided to Divisions of General Practice, Royal Flying Doctors Service and Aboriginal Medical Services.



Allied Health Professionals

- Social workers
- Occupational therapists
- Psychologists
- Mental health nurses
- Aboriginal health workers
- Aboriginal mental health workers



The Program

- Total funding is \$91.63 million for the period 2006-07 to 2012-13
- 39 organisations funded
- 23,000 -total number of clients accessing services since July 2007.
- 80,000 –total number of services provided
- Further information about the Program can be obtained from the website:
www.mentalhealth.gov.au



Workforce

- There are currently 181 staff engaged under the Mental Health Services in Rural and Remote Areas program.
- This includes 39 social workers and 5 occupational therapists.



Evaluation of the Program

- This program is also currently being evaluated to assess the overall appropriateness, effectiveness and impact of the program
- This will include the impact on access to mental health care and the supply and distribution of the allied mental health workforce.



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