

# Help for depression, anxiety and related disorders under Medicare



FACT SHEET 24

## **Better Access to Mental Health Care initiative**

### **WHAT IS THE *BETTER ACCESS TO MENTAL HEALTH CARE* INITIATIVE?**

On 1 November 2006, the Australian Government introduced the *Better Access to Mental Health Care* initiative which provides Medicare rebates for a range of mental health services, which were previously not subsidised.

Rebates are now available for consultations with psychiatrists, general practitioners, psychologists, social workers and occupational therapists.

To qualify for rebates under the *Better Access* initiative, a person with depression, anxiety or other mental disorder first needs to get a referral from a General Practitioner (GP), psychiatrist or paediatrician.

### **WHO IS ELIGIBLE FOR MEDICARE REBATES UNDER THE *BETTER ACCESS* INITIATIVE?**

A person with a mental disorder may receive treatment for which rebates are available.

'Mental disorder' is a term used to describe a range of conditions including:

- depression
- anxiety
- panic disorder
- obsessive compulsive disorder
- post-traumatic stress disorder
- generalised anxiety disorders and phobias
- bipolar disorder
- drug-use disorders
- alcohol-use disorders.

### **WHAT TYPE OF TREATMENT IS AVAILABLE AND WHO PROVIDES IT?**

Under the *Better Access* initiative, GPs, psychiatrists and paediatricians will work together with psychologists, social workers and occupational therapists to support them in providing people with a range of psychological treatments. These services include:

#### **GP Mental Health Care**

##### **1. GP Mental Health Care Plan**

In many cases, the first step in accessing these services will be a consultation with a GP.

The GP will assist the person to develop a plan for the treatment of the individual's particular mental health problems. The plan will nominate the health professionals to whom the person will be referred and the available rebates for those services.

In one calendar year, a person with depression or another mental health problem, who is eligible for the rebates, can receive up to 12 individual consultations (18 in exceptional circumstances) with a psychologist or other mental health professional and up to 12 group therapy sessions.

##### **2. Review of a GP Mental Health Care Plan**

The referring GP will assess the person's progress after each block of six sessions with a psychologist, or other mental health professional, using the Mental Health Care Plan as a guide. This will determine whether the person is receiving the right treatment or if other options need to be explored.

There may be a waiting period between making an appointment and seeing a GP. Waiting times can vary. Between making the appointment and the consultation, it's a good idea to find out more about psychological treatment. You can do this by reading *beyondblue* Fact Sheet 5 – Why use both psychological treatments and medication? which can be printed from the *beyondblue* website at [www.beyondblue.org.au](http://www.beyondblue.org.au) or ordered from the *beyondblue* info line on 1300 22 4636 (local call).

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### 3. GP Mental Health Care Consultation

A GP can now provide a long consultation under Medicare (at least 20 minutes) for a person with a mental disorder. This time can be used to develop a treatment plan or to monitor an existing plan and treatment.

### Psychological Treatment

Under the *Better Access* initiative, people who have been diagnosed with depression, anxiety or another mental disorder may receive the psychological treatments below.

#### 1. Psychological Therapy

A GP, psychiatrist or paediatrician may refer a person to a clinical psychologist who can provide psychological therapy that could include one or more of the following:

- **Psycho-education** is aimed at helping people with a mental illness find out more about their condition and how to manage it.
- **Cognitive Behaviour Therapy (CBT)** helps to correct negative thought patterns. CBT is a structured program which recognises that the way people think affects the way they feel. CBT teaches people to think rationally about common difficulties.
- **Interpersonal Therapy (IPT)** is a structured program with a specific focus on improving relationships. People with depression and related disorders may sometimes be easily upset by other people's comments or feel criticised when no criticism was intended. IPT helps people find new ways to get along with others.

A person can receive psychological therapy either individually or in a group.

#### 2. Focused Psychological Strategies

If a GP has had special training in mental health, he/she may provide focused psychological strategies themselves.

Alternatively a GP, psychiatrist or paediatrician may refer the person to a social worker, occupational therapist or non-clinical psychologist who can provide psychological treatment or utilise the following focused strategies:

- **Relaxation strategies**

Stress can affect how a person breathes and can cause muscle tension. Breathing quickly and having tense muscles can in turn, make a person feel more stressed. This vicious cycle can be stopped by learning and practising breathing and muscle relaxation techniques. Relaxation exercises help people to recognise the symptoms of anxiety and use specific relaxation techniques to feel less anxious.

For more details on relaxation techniques see *beyondblue* Fact Sheet 6 – Reducing stress which can be printed from the *beyondblue* website at [www.beyondblue.org.au](http://www.beyondblue.org.au) or ordered from the *beyondblue* info line on 1300 22 4636 (local call).

- **Skills training**

Mental health professionals can train people in how to develop strategies for:

- problem solving
- anger management
- improving social skills
- improving communication
- stress management
- better parenting.

These sessions can also be conducted individually or in a group setting.

### Other services for which new Medicare rebates are available

- **Initial consultation with a psychiatrist**

A new Medicare rebate is available when a person sees a psychiatrist for the first time. A higher rebate is now available for this service to encourage psychiatrists to see new patients.

- **Assessment and management plan with a psychiatrist**

When a person is referred to a psychiatrist and the psychiatrist (not the GP) provides an assessment and management plan, there is also a new Medicare rebate available for this service.

- **Review of management plan with a psychiatrist**

A new Medicare rebate is available when a person has their management plan reviewed by a psychiatrist.



WHAT IS THE SERVICE?	WHO PROVIDES IT?	SCHEDULE FEE	REBATE
GP Mental Health Care Plan (Preparation)	A doctor working in General Practice (GP)	\$150.00	\$150.00
GP Mental Health Care Plan (Review)	GP	\$100.00	\$100.00
GP Mental Health Care Consultation	GP	\$66.00	\$66.00
Initial Consultation	Psychiatrist	\$230.00	\$195.50
Assessment and Management Plan	Psychiatrist	\$400.00	\$340.00
Review of Management Plan	Psychiatrist	\$250.00	\$212.50
Individual Psychological Therapy	Clinical Psychologist	\$88.20 (30-50 mins)	\$75.00 (30-50 mins)
		\$129.40 (50+ mins)	\$110.00 (50+ mins)
Individual Focused Psychological Strategies	Non-Clinical Psychologist	\$62.50 (20-50 mins)	\$53.15 (20-50 mins)
		\$88.20 (50+ mins)	\$75.00 (50+ mins)
Individual Focused Psychological Strategies	A GP with Level Two <i>Better Outcomes in Mental Health Care</i> Training	\$80.35 (30-40 mins)	\$80.35 (30-40 mins)
		\$115.00 (40+ mins)	\$115.00 (40+ mins)
Individual Focused Psychological Strategies	Social Worker/ Occupational Therapist	\$55.05 (20-50 mins)	\$46.80 (20-50 mins)
		\$77.70 (50+ mins)	\$66.05 (50+ mins)
Group Psychological Therapy	Clinical Psychologist	\$32.90	\$28.00
Group Focused Psychological Strategies	Non-Clinical Psychologist	\$22.45	\$19.10
Group Focused Psychological Strategies	Social Worker/ Occupational Therapist	\$19.75	\$16.80

### Service costs and rebates

Under the *Better Access* initiative, Medicare rebates are available for a range of mental health treatments. The rebate will depend on what service is being provided and who is providing it.

**It is important to note that while the rebate (the amount a person can claim from Medicare) is standard, the amount the provider actually charges can vary from one mental health professional to another.** It's a good idea to find out the cost of the service and the available rebate before making an appointment. The receptionist should be able to provide this information. Also find out if payment or part-payment is required on the day of the consultation.

If the health professional bulk bills, the person who is receiving treatment won't have to pay anything.

### How often can a person have psychological treatment and qualify for a Medicare rebate?

A person may be referred for psychological treatment for up to 12 individual sessions (or 18 in exceptional circumstances) and/or 12 group sessions in any one calendar year.

### How does a person access treatment?

Generally the first step in starting treatments under the *Better Access* initiative is a visit to a GP, but it depends on whether the person has already been diagnosed or is receiving treatment.

1. If a person is not already accessing psychological treatments, but suspects they have a mental disorder, a GP can provide a diagnosis and if appropriate, refer the person for psychological treatment.



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2. If the person has been diagnosed with a mental disorder, but is not currently being treated and would like to start treatment, he/she should speak to a GP about developing a GP Mental Health Care Plan, including any appropriate referrals.
3. If a person is already seeing a psychiatrist or paediatrician and wants to receive psychological treatments from a different mental health professional, they can be referred by the psychiatrist or paediatrician to a psychologist, occupational therapist or social worker.
4. If the person is currently seeing a psychologist and not receiving the Medicare rebate, he/she will need to talk to a GP and discuss their eligibility for accessing services under this Scheme.

### Should family members/friends be involved?

It's up to the individual whether or not they would like a family member, carer or friend to be involved in their treatment. A doctor or mental health professional will not discuss a person's mental health problems with anyone without the person's permission.

Sometimes it can be helpful for the person receiving treatment to have a family member or friend involved, as this will provide support for them when they are unwell and may encourage them to stick with the treatment plan. This is a decision that needs to be made on an individual basis.

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## MORE INFORMATION

### ***beyondblue: the national depression initiative***

**[www.beyondblue.org.au](http://www.beyondblue.org.au)**

Information on depression, anxiety and related substance-use disorders, available treatments and where to get help including a list of doctors and psychologists

***beyondblue* info line 1300 22 4636**

Information on depression, anxiety and related substance-use disorders, available treatments and referral only (local call)

**[www.youthbeyondblue.com](http://www.youthbeyondblue.com)**

*beyondblue's* website for young people – information on depression and how to help a friend

### **The Australian Government Department of Health and Ageing**

**[www.health.gov.au](http://www.health.gov.au)**

Information on the Better Access initiative and other government-related health initiatives

### **Australian Psychological Society (APS)**

**[www.psychology.org.au](http://www.psychology.org.au)**

Information on what a psychologist does and what services are available under the Better Access initiative

### **Australian Association of Social Workers (AASW)**

**[www.aasw.asn.au](http://www.aasw.asn.au)**

Find a social worker who can provide psychological treatment for people with mental health problems under the *Better Access* initiative

### **Occupational Therapy (OT) Association**

**[www.ausot.com.au](http://www.ausot.com.au)**

Find an OT who can provide psychological treatment for people with mental health problems under the *Better Access* initiative

### **Australian General Practice Network**

**[www.agpn.com.au](http://www.agpn.com.au)**

Information on the role of GPs in providing services