



THE HON CHRISTOPHER PYNE MP

Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister for Health and Ageing

9 October 2006

CP60/06

Better access to mental health services

The Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister for Health and Ageing, Christopher Pyne, said reforms to new Medicare items were a major step towards building a better mental health system.

Speaking at Parliament House today Mr Pyne said the new Medicare items will be available from 1 November this year, as part of the Government's *Better Access to Psychiatrists, Psychologists and General Practitioners through the Medicare Benefits Schedule* initiative at a cost of \$538 million over five years.

These items promote a team approach to mental health, with general practitioners encouraged to work with psychiatrists, clinical psychologists and other allied mental health professionals to increase the availability of care.

Mr Pyne said the rollout next month of a series of new Medicare items will lead to better, more affordable delivery of mental health care throughout Australia.

"This is a major down-payment on the Government's \$1.9 billion commitment to reform Australia's mental health system, as part of the Council of Australian Governments' Mental Health package," he said.

"From 1 November, people interested in accessing any of the new mental health services being funded should talk to their GP, psychiatrist, or paediatrician."

Medicare rebates will be available for GPs to provide early intervention, assessment and management of patients with mental disorders, as part of a GP Mental Health Care Plan. A new GP Mental Health consultation item will be available for doctors to provide continuing management of patients with mental disorders. New items will also be available for psychiatrists seeing a patient for the first time.

The new items also provide for patients to be referred for treatment by psychiatrists, clinical psychologists and other appropriately trained allied mental health professionals. Patients who are referred by a GP in the context of a GP Mental Health Care Plan, or by a psychiatrist or paediatrician, will be eligible for Medicare rebates for up to 12 individual, as well as up to 12 group-based therapy sessions in a calendar year.

The Government will also be spending an additional \$51.7 million over five years to improve mental health services in rural and remote communities throughout Australia.

Funding will be distributed on a needs basis, rather than a population basis, with rural and remote communities in Queensland, South Australia, Western Australia and the Northern Territory expected to receive a higher proportion. Funding will be provided to organisations like Divisions of General Practice, Aboriginal Medical Services and the Royal Flying Doctor Service.

“These changes are not about a ‘quick fix’ for Australia’s mental health system. Rather, they provide a vital foundation for a range of other initiatives to be delivered by the Government which over time aim to improve access to, and the quality of, mental health care.”

Media contact: Adam Howard 0400 414 833