

THE HON MARK BUTLER MP
Minister for Mental Health and Ageing
Minister Assisting the Prime Minister on Mental Health Reform
Minister for Social Inclusion

STATEMENT FROM THE MINISTER

1 February 2012 - CHANGES TO BETTER ACCESS

In the 2011-12 Budget, the Gillard Government brought in changes to the Better Access program to deliver a mental health package that better targeted and supported some of the most disadvantaged people in our community.

The changes to Better Access allow us to rebalance our investments across new and innovative services that target and address mental illness throughout a person's lifespan.

While Better Access was neither designed nor intended to provide intensive services or ongoing therapy for people with severe and persistent mental illness, the Government acknowledges there are some people with more complex needs who have come to rely on the program for support.

We recognise that reducing the number of rebatable sessions has caused some community concern and that the new services in our mental health package need to build further capacity before they are fully able to provide care and support to those with more complex needs.

We will therefore reinstate the additional 6 services under 'exceptional circumstances' for a transitional period to 31 December 2012. The transitional period will provide sufficient time for our new mental health services to build capacity and effectively respond to people with more complex needs.

The standard number of rebatable sessions under Better Access will remain at 10, consistent with the program's focus on people with mental disorders where short term interventions are most likely to be useful. However, this change means that eligible individuals can receive up to 16 services in the transitional period where 'exceptional circumstances' apply.

In addition, individuals will continue to be able to receive Medicare rebates for ten group therapy services per calendar year on top of their individual sessions. People with more severe and ongoing mental disorders can also be referred to Medicare subsidised consultant psychiatrist services (where 50 sessions can be provided per year), or to other specialised mental health services.

Individuals will be eligible for an additional 6 allied mental health services under 'exceptional circumstances' from 1 March 2012 until 31 December 2012.

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