

Help for depression, anxiety and related disorders under Medicare



FACT SHEET 24

Better Access to Mental Health Care

WHAT IS THE BETTER ACCESS TO MENTAL HEALTH CARE PROGRAM?

On 1 November 2006, the Australian Government introduced the *Better Access* to psychologists, psychiatrists and GPs through the Medicare Benefits Schedule (MBS) Program.

Rebates are available for consultations with psychiatrists, clinical psychologists, psychologists, social workers and occupational therapists.

To qualify for rebates under the *Better Access* program, 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 PROGRAM?

A person with a mental disorder is eligible for Medicare rebates.

'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* program GPs, psychiatrists and paediatricians will work together with psychologists, social workers and occupational therapists to provide people with a range of psychological treatments. These services include:

GP Mental Health Care

1. GP Mental Health Treatment Plans

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 professional/s 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 and up to 12 group therapy sessions with a mental health professional under Medicare.

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 looking at www.beyondblue.org.au under Get Information, Downloadable *beyondblue* Information resources, Treatment.

2. GP Mental Health Treatment Plan Review

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 Treatment Plan as a guide. This will determine whether the person is receiving the right treatment or if other options need to be explored.

GPs who have completed accredited mental health skills training (under the *Better Access* initiative) can claim a higher rebate for the completion or review of a Mental Health Treatment Plan than GPs who have *not* undertaken mental health skills training. This is to encourage more GPs to undertake specific training in mental health.

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3. GP Mental Health Treatment Consultation

A GP can provide a long consultation under Medicare (at least 20 minutes) for a person with a mental disorder. This time can be used to provide treatment, advice and/or referral for other services or treatment.

Psychological Treatment

Under the *Better Access* program, 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)** is one of the most researched psychological therapies and has a lot of evidence to support its effectiveness in treating people for depression and anxiety disorders. It teaches people to think realistically about common difficulties, helping them to change their thought patterns and the way they react to certain situations. Behavioural therapy approaches have been shown to be very helpful for many anxiety disorders.
- **Interpersonal Therapy (IPT)** has also been researched and found to be effective for treatment of depression. It helps people find new ways to get along with others and to resolve losses, changes and conflict in relationships.

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 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 stress 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* online **Fact sheet 6 – Reducing Stress** which can be printed from the *beyondblue* website at 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 be conducted individually or in a group setting.

Other services for which Medicare rebates are available

• Initial consultation with a psychiatrist

A Medicare rebate is available when a person sees a psychiatrist for the first time. A higher rebate is 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 Medicare rebate available for this service.

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WHAT IS THE SERVICE?	WHO PROVIDES IT?	SCHEDULE FEE	REBATE
Mental Health Treatment Plan (Preparation)	General Practitioner (GP)	\$163.35	75% = \$122.55 100% = \$163.35
Mental Health Treatment Plan (Review)	GP	\$108.90	75% = \$81.70 100% = \$108.90
Mental Health Treatment Consultation	GP	\$71.85	\$71.85
Initial Consultation	Psychiatrist	\$250.45	75% = \$187.85 85% = \$212.90
Assessment and Management Plan	Psychiatrist	\$435.50	85% = \$370.20
Review of Management Plan	Psychiatrist	\$272.20	85% = \$231.40
Individual Psychological Therapy	Clinical Psychologist	\$96.00 (30-50 mins)	85% = \$81.60
		\$140.90 (50+ mins)	85% = \$119.80
Individual Focused Psychological Strategies	Non-Clinical Psychologist	\$68.00 (20-50 mins)	85% = \$57.80
		\$96.00 (50+ mins)	85% = \$81.60
Individual Focused Psychological Strategies	A GP with Level One and Two <i>Better Outcomes in Mental Health Skills</i> Training	\$87.50 (30-40 mins)	100% = \$87.50
		\$125.20 (40+ mins)	100% = \$125.20
Individual Focused Psychological Strategies	Social Worker / Occupational Therapist	\$59.90 (20-50 mins)	85% = \$50.95
		\$84.60 (50+ mins)	85% = \$71.95
Group Psychological Therapy	Clinical Psychologist	\$35.80 (60+ mins)	85% = \$30.45
Group Focused Psychological Strategies	Non-Clinical Psychologist	\$24.50 (60+ mins)	85% = \$20.85
Group Focused Psychological Strategies	Social Worker / Occupational Therapist	\$21.50 (60+ mins)	85% = \$18.30

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

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

Service costs and rebates

Under the *Better Access* program, 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 and 12 group sessions in any one calendar year.

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How does a person access treatment?

Generally the first step in starting treatment under the *Better Access* program 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.
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 Treatment 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 clinical psychologist, psychologist, occupational therapist or social worker.
4. If the person is currently seeing a clinical psychologist or 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 program.

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.

beyondblue: the national depression initiative
Info line 1300 22 4636 or infoline@beyondblue.org.au
www.beyondblue.org.au

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MORE INFORMATION

beyondblue: the national depression initiative

www.beyondblue.org.au

Information on depression, anxiety and related disorders, available treatments and where to get help including a list of doctors and other mental health practitioners

***beyondblue* info line 1300 22 4636 (local call)**

infoline@beyondblue.org.au

Information on depression, anxiety and related disorders, available treatments and referral only

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/mentalhealth

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

Australian Psychological Society (APS)

www.psychology.org.au

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

Australian Association of Social Workers (AASW)

www.aasw.asn.au

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

Occupational Therapy Australia

www.ausot.com.au

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

Australian General Practice Network

www.agpn.com.au

Information for GPs in providing services under the *Better Access* program