

Federal Budget delays opportunity for allied health benefits to consumers

Allied Health Professions Australia (AHPA) and its members welcome the lift of the Medicare freeze for GPs but collectively are disappointed that the staged implementation will delay the increase in benefits for allied health services until 2019.

“We call upon the government to make an urgent commitment to reintroducing indexation to Medicare-funded allied health services now, not delaying it until July 2019, and to reviewing the adequacy of Medicare rebates for allied health services,” said Lin Oke, Executive Officer of AHPA.

“AHPA is disappointed that at a time when chronic and complex illnesses are the biggest health threat for Australians, the government has not lifted the freeze on the indexation of allied health MBS items. This sends the wrong message about the value of allied health primary care services that can improve health outcomes and prevent avoidable complications and hospitalisation.”

Allied health practices are increasingly struggling to provide services for consumers who lack the ability to pay privately due to ongoing freezes of both Medicare and Department of Veteran’s Affairs (DVA) funding. Low rebate levels are exacerbated by the small number of funded allied health consultations available through Chronic Disease Management and Better Access to Mental Health Medicare funding.

Professor Brendan Murphy, Australia’s Chief Medical Officer, noted last week that out of pocket health care costs now made up a third of total health expenditure and was increasingly leading to the risk of a health system that no longer provided universal care.

“Professor Murphy’s statement reflects what our members are telling us, which is that the public system is failing the people that need care”, said Ms Oke.

Allied Health Professions Australia and its members have mixed reactions to the 2017-18 Federal Budget, as it is noted with pleasure that the Federal Government has made important commitments to disability and mental health services.

“This is a budget with some positives for the Australian health consumers in need of allied health services. The government’s commitment to funding the shortfall for National Disability Insurance Scheme (NDIS) services provides greater security for individual and families experiencing disability and the allied health service providers that support them.” said Ms Oke.

“AHPA also welcomes the new investment into mental health services, in particular the recognition of the importance of increasing access to psychological services through telehealth and committing funding to support people with mental health issues not eligible for the NDIS.”

“The government has taken an important step in recognising the importance of telehealth-based services to improve rural access to services and AHPA calls for a similar extension of telehealth eligibility to be introduced for other Medicare-funded allied health services.”

Media contact

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About Allied Health Professions Australia

Allied Health Professions Australia (AHPA) consists of 22 national allied health professional association members and a further four associations with whom it is formally allied. The collective membership of these 22 national associations is almost 95,000 allied health practitioners, with more than 12,000 working in rural and remote localities in Australia. AHPA and its association members play a key role in promoting the role of allied health practitioners and in advocating for their needs.

Allied health professionals represent almost 20% of the health workforce, providing diagnosis, treatment and rehabilitation, often autonomously and across a variety of public, private and not-for-profit settings. Australia's 175,000 allied health professionals deliver an estimated 200 million health services annually. Together with doctors and nurses, allied health professionals are regarded as the third pillar of health care in Australia.