Evaluation of the Better Access initiative

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Better Access

• Introduced in November 2006
• Enables consumers to receive a specified number of Medicare-reimbursable sessions of mental health care from an allied health professional (on referral from a GP who completes a Mental Health Treatment Plan), or sessions of mental health care from the GP him/herself

• Modified in recent Federal Budget:
  • Reduction in permissible number of sessions with allied health professionals
  • Introduction of two-tier rebate for GP Mental Health Treatment Plans
Evaluation

Drew on 20 different data sources to answer a range of questions about the appropriateness and effectiveness of Better Access:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>3. Component B: Analysis of Medicare Benefits Schedule (MBS) and Pharmaceutical Benefits Scheme (PBS) data</td>
<td>13. The Bettering the Evaluation and Care of Health (BEACH) program</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. Component D: Stakeholder consultations</td>
<td>15. Australian Psychological Society (APS) surveys of members</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8. Independent analyses of the 2007 NSMHWB, including comparisons with the 1997 NSMHWB</td>
<td>18. APS survey of consumers</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11. Australian Institute of Health and Welfare (AIHW) analyses of service-level and patient-level MBS data</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Component A: A study of consumers and their outcomes

- Novel methodology under which participating psychologists, GPs (and psychiatrists) recruited consumers when they first presented for services via the Better Access item numbers.
- Consumers were followed during the course of their care, and their outcomes monitored.
- Primary data were collected via a password-protected minimum dataset (provider-level, consumer-level, session-level).
- Supplementary data were collected via telephone interviews with providers and consumers.
# Actual and target samples of providers

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Approached</th>
<th>Recruited</th>
<th>Retained (i.e., did not actively withdraw)</th>
<th>Participated</th>
<th>Original target</th>
<th>Revised target</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Clinical psychologists</td>
<td>509</td>
<td>77</td>
<td>57</td>
<td>41</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>40</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Registered psychologists</td>
<td>640</td>
<td>81</td>
<td>73</td>
<td>49</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>40</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>GPs</td>
<td>1,280</td>
<td>125</td>
<td>90</td>
<td>39</td>
<td>40</td>
<td>160</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TOTAL</td>
<td>2,429</td>
<td>283</td>
<td>220</td>
<td>129</td>
<td>80</td>
<td>240</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Actual and target samples of consumers

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Recruited, retained and participated</th>
<th>Original target</th>
<th>Revised target</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Seen by clinical psychologists</td>
<td>289</td>
<td>100-200</td>
<td>200-400</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Seen by registered psychologists</td>
<td>317</td>
<td>100-200</td>
<td>200-400</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Seen by GPs</td>
<td>277</td>
<td>200-400</td>
<td>800-1,600</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TOTAL</td>
<td>883</td>
<td>400-800</td>
<td>1,200-2,400</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Nature of participation by providers

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Recruited consumers and entered data into minimum dataset</th>
<th>Provided views on delivering care through Better Access</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Took part in interview</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Clinical psychologists (n=40)</td>
<td>40</td>
<td>39</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Registered psychologists (n=48)</td>
<td>48</td>
<td>44</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>GPs (n=39)</td>
<td>39</td>
<td>31</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TOTAL (n=127)</td>
<td>127</td>
<td>114</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Nature of participation by consumers

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Had relevant socio-demographic, clinical and treatment data entered into minimum dataset</th>
<th>Had pre- and post-treatment outcome data entered into minimum dataset</th>
<th>Provided views on receiving care through Better Access</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Took part in interview</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Seen by clinical psychologists (n=289)</td>
<td>289</td>
<td>205</td>
<td>112</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Seen by registered psychologists (n=317)</td>
<td>317</td>
<td>208</td>
<td>136</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Seen by GPs (n=277)</td>
<td>277</td>
<td>177</td>
<td>104</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TOTAL (n=883)</td>
<td>883</td>
<td>590</td>
<td>352</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Providers: Gender

Clinical psychologists

- Participating clinical psychologists
- All clinical psychologists

Registered psychologists

- Participating registered psychologists
- All registered psychologists

GPs

- Participating GPs
- All GPs
Providers: Age

**Clinical psychologists**
- Participating clinical psychologists
- All clinical psychologists

**Registered psychologists**
- Participating registered psychologists
- All registered psychologists

**GPs**
- Participating GPs
- All GPs
Providers: Year of qualification

Clinical psychologists

- *Participating clinical psychologists*
- *All clinical psychologists*

Registered psychologists

- *Participating registered psychologists*
- *All registered psychologists*

GPs

- *Participating GPs*
- *All GPs*
### Providers: Better Access sessions/consumers

#### Clinical psychologists
- **Participating clinical psychologists**: 450
- **All clinical psychologists**: 500

#### Registered psychologists
- **Participating registered psychologists**: 350
- **All registered psychologists**: 200

#### GPs
- **Participating GPs**: 200
- **All GPs**: 150
Consumers: Gender

Consumers seen by clinical psychologists

Consumers seen by registered psychologists

Consumers seen by GPs
Consumers: Age

Consumers seen by clinical psychologists

Consumers seen by registered psychologists

Consumers seen by GPs
Consumers: Socio-economic disadvantage

Consumers seen by clinical psychologists

Consumers seen by registered psychologists

Consumers seen by GPs
Consumers: Diagnosis

Consumers seen by clinical psychologists

- All participating consumers
- Participating consumers with outcome data

Consumers seen by registered psychologists

- All participating consumers
- Participating consumers with outcome data

Consumers seen by GPs

- All participating consumers
- Participating consumers with outcome data
Consumers: Pre-treatment K10 score

Consumers seen by clinical psychologists

Consumers seen by registered psychologists

Consumers seen by GPs
Consumers: Previous history of mental health care

Consumers seen by clinical psychologists

- All participating consumers
- Participating consumers with outcome data

Consumers seen by registered psychologists

- All participating consumers
- Participating consumers with outcome data

Consumers seen by GPs

- All participating consumers
- Participating consumers with outcome data
Consumers: Median number of sessions

**Consumers seen by clinical psychologists**

- **All participating consumers**
- **Participating consumers with outcome data**

**Consumers seen by registered psychologists**

- **All participating consumers**
- **Participating consumers with outcome data**

**Consumers seen by GPs**

- **All participating consumers**
- **Participating consumers with outcome data**
Consumers: Treatment received

Consumers seen by clinical psychologists

Consumers seen by registered psychologists

Consumers seen by GPs
Consumers: Copayment

Consumers recruited by clinical psychologists

- Paid co-payment in at least one session: 60%
- Did not pay co-payment in any session: 40%

Consumers recruited by registered psychologists

- Paid co-payment in at least one session: 60%
- Did not pay co-payment in any session: 40%

Consumers recruited by GPs

- Received CBT in at least one session: 80%
- Received no CBT in any session: 20%
Consumers’ pre- and post-treatment K-10 scores, by provider type

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Seen by clinical psychologists (n=189)</th>
<th>Seen by registered psychologists (n=174)</th>
<th>Seen by GPs (n=77)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Mean pre-treatment scores</td>
<td>28.63</td>
<td>29.44</td>
<td>30.89</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mean post-treatment scores</td>
<td>19.09</td>
<td>18.86</td>
<td>22.88</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Moderate to severe levels of psychological distress

Mild to moderate levels of psychological distress
## Consumers’ pre- and post-treatment DASS-21 scores, by provider type

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Scale</th>
<th>Mean pre-treatment scores</th>
<th>Mean post-treatment scores</th>
<th>Seen by clinical psychologists (n=205)</th>
<th>Seen by registered psychologists (n=204)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Depression scale</td>
<td>Mean pre-treatment scores</td>
<td>21.02</td>
<td>20.41</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Mean post-treatment scores</td>
<td>9.66</td>
<td>8.96</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Anxiety scale</td>
<td>Mean pre-treatment scores</td>
<td>14.75</td>
<td>15.34</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Mean post-treatment scores</td>
<td>7.58</td>
<td>6.55</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Stress scale</td>
<td>Mean pre-treatment scores</td>
<td>22.85</td>
<td>23.91</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Mean post-treatment scores</td>
<td>12.93</td>
<td>12.22</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Depression scale**
- Moderate – severe levels of depression
- Normal-mild levels of depression

**Anxiety scale**
- Moderate-severe levels of anxiety
- Normal-mild levels of anxiety

**Stress scale**
- Moderate levels of stress
- Normal levels of stress
Providers’ experiences of delivering care through Better Access (1)

• Extremely positive
• Has enabled psychologists to establish or expand private practice, and provided GPs with referral pathway not previously available
• Psychologists’ caseloads have grown and GPs are seeing more people with mental health problems
• Consumers seen by these providers often have complex needs and are on low incomes, and many would not have had access to mental health care in the past
• Providers have developed mutual respect and improved collaboration
• Positive experiences with dealing with Medicare
• Varying charging policies
Providers’ experiences of delivering care through Better Access (2)

- Few negative impacts
- Sometimes communication has been sub-optimal
- Some administrative issues
- Some confusion over the ‘rules’ of Better Access
- Some queries re. restrictions on number of sessions and forms of therapy
- Some dissatisfaction with levels of rebate
Consumers’ experiences of receiving care through Better Access (1)

• Extremely positive
• Many had experienced hurdles to accessing mental health care in the past and appreciated fact that Better Access made mental health care more readily available
• Most had found the process of dealing with Medicare straightforward
• Most felt that the clinical care met their needs
• Many specifically commented on the attributes and skills of the providers they had seen, and on the usefulness of therapy they had received
• Majority indicated that they had experienced significant changes for the better in terms of their mental health and their ability to cope
• Most attributed these changes, at least in part, to the care they had received through Better Access
Consumers’ experiences of receiving care through Better Access (2)

• Few complaints
• Those who did identify negative aspects tended to focus on the restricted number of sessions, or on residual difficulties with out-of-pocket payments
• Some also found the process of “opening up” about their mental health issues confronting
Conclusions

- Clinical psychologists, registered psychologists and GPs who are providing therapy under Better Access are playing an important role in meeting the community’s previously unmet need for mental health care.
- They are making an important contribution in terms of facilitating access to care, and offering a service that consumers appreciate.
- Perhaps the most important arbiter of the success of Better Access, however, is that the therapeutic efforts of these providers are yielding significant improvements in consumers’ mental health and wellbeing.