

Chapter 4: Clinical and treatment characteristics of Better Access consumers

Until now, it has not been possible to accurately profile consumers who use Better Access services in terms of their clinical characteristics and the nature of treatment they receive. Basic socio-demographic details (namely those described in Chapter 3) are routinely collected by Medicare Australia, as are details of the number of sessions of care provided. However, it is beyond the capacity of Medicare Australia's systems to collect consumer-level data on variables like diagnosis, severity of symptoms, and specific treatment received.

Our minimum dataset was purpose designed to collect key information about the clinical and treatment characteristics of Better Access consumers. The remainder of this chapter presents this information for the full groups of consumers who participated in the evaluation and for the sub-samples for whom outcome data were available. Having established in the previous chapter that our samples were broadly representative of all Better Access users, we would suggest that these profiles can be cautiously generalised.

Clinical characteristics

Tables 12, 13 and 14 outline the clinical characteristics of participating consumers. They consider diagnosis, level of psychological distress (as assessed by the K-10), and previous history of mental health care.

Diagnosis was classified hierarchically,^b with greatest emphasis given to depression and anxiety on the grounds that these are the two disorders that are primarily targeted by Better Access. Around three quarters of the consumers recruited by each type of provider had depression with or without anxiety (and with or without other diagnoses), and about another one fifth had anxiety without depression (with or without other diagnoses). The sub-groups for whom pre- and post-treatment outcome data were available shared these diagnostic profiles. Just over one tenth of the general population meet diagnostic criteria for these disorders in any given year.³

Four fifths of participating consumers recruited by each type of provider were experiencing high or very high levels of psychological distress (as assessed by the K-10) when they presented for care. The sub-groups for whom pre- and post-treatment outcome data were available also demonstrated this pattern. Less than one tenth of the general population experience these levels of psychological distress.⁴

Only two fifths of participating consumers who were recruited by clinical and registered psychologists had previously received mental health care; slightly more (three fifths) of those who were recruited by GPs had done so. These patterns held for the respective sub-groups of consumers for whom outcome data were available.

^b The hierarchy worked in the following way. Consumers with depression and anxiety were classified as having both disorders, irrespective of whether they had additional diagnoses (i.e., alcohol and drug use disorders, psychotic disorders, unexplained somatic disorders, and/or other disorders). Consumers with depression but not anxiety were classified as having depression, irrespective of whether they had any of the previously-mentioned additional diagnoses. Consumers with anxiety but not depression were classified as having anxiety, irrespective of whether they had any of the additional diagnoses. Consumers without depression or anxiety were classified as having other disorders, as were those with unknown or missing diagnoses.

Table 12: Clinical profiles of consumers seen by clinical psychologists through Better Access

		Participating consumers ¹ (n=289) ²		Participating consumers for whom pre-and post-treatment outcome data were available ¹ (n=205) ²	
		Freq	%	Freq	%
Diagnosis	Depression and anxiety ³	99	34%	69	34%
	Depression without anxiety ³	105	36%	71	35%
	Anxiety without depression ³	66	23%	51	25%
	Other ⁴	19	7%	14	7%
Pre-treatment K-10 score	10-15 (Low psychological distress)	13	5%	9	4%
	16-21 (Moderate psychological distress)	37	13%	28	14%
	22-29 (High psychological distress)	103	36%	78	38%
	≥30 (Very high psychological distress)	133	47%	89	44%
Previous history of mental health care	No previous history of mental health care	169	58%	128	62%
	Previous history of mental health care	109	38%	69	34%
	Unknown	11	4%	8	4%

1. Received care through Better Access between 1 Oct 2009 and 31 Oct 2010.
2. Cells do not always sum to the total n due to some missing data.
3. With or without alcohol and drug use disorders, psychotic disorders, and/or unexplained somatic disorders.
4. Alcohol and drug use disorders, psychotic disorders, unexplained somatic disorders, and/or unknown or missing diagnoses.

Table 13: Clinical profiles of consumers seen by registered psychologists through Better Access

		Participating consumers ¹ (n=317) ²		Participating consumers for whom pre-and post-treatment outcome data were available ¹ (n=208) ²	
		Freq	%	Freq	%
Diagnosis	Depression and anxiety ³	121	38%	76	37%
	Depression without anxiety ³	117	37%	77	37%
	Anxiety without depression ³	60	19%	40	19%
	Other ⁴	19	6%	15	7%
Pre-treatment K-10 score	10-15 (Low psychological distress)	8	3%	5	3%
	16-21 (Moderate psychological distress)	43	14%	27	14%
	22-29 (High psychological distress)	93	31%	62	31%
	≥30 (Very high psychological distress)	159	53%	105	53%
Previous history of mental health care	No previous history of mental health care	162	51%	107	51%
	Previous history of mental health care	134	42%	90	43%
	Unknown	21	7%	11	5%

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3. With or without alcohol and drug use disorders, psychotic disorders, and/or unexplained somatic disorders.
4. Alcohol and drug use disorders, psychotic disorders, unexplained somatic disorders, and/or unknown or missing diagnoses.

Table 14: Clinical profiles of consumers seen by GPs through Better Access

		Participating consumers ¹ (n=277) ²		Participating consumers for whom pre-and post-treatment outcome data were available ¹ (n=177) ²	
		Freq	%	Freq	%
Diagnosis	Depression and anxiety ³	113	41%	81	46%
	Depression without anxiety ³	102	37%	52	29%
	Anxiety without depression ³	38	14%	28	16%
	Other ⁴	24	9%	16	9%
Pre-treatment K-10 score	10-15 (Low psychological distress)	8	3%	5	3%
	16-21 (Moderate psychological distress)	26	10%	19	11%
	22-29 (High psychological distress)	81	30%	50	28%
	≥30 (Very high psychological distress)	158	58%	103	58%
Previous history of mental health care	No previous history of mental health care	117	42%	72	41%
	Previous history of mental health care	156	56%	101	57%
	Unknown	4	1%	4	2%

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3. With or without alcohol and drug use disorders, psychotic disorders, and/or unexplained somatic disorders.
4. Alcohol and drug use disorders, psychotic disorders, unexplained somatic disorders, and/or unknown or missing diagnoses.

Treatment characteristics

Tables 15, 16 and 17 describe the treatment profile of participating consumers. They consider the number of sessions of care received, the kind of treatment offered in those sessions, whether treatment was completed, and whether a co-payment was made.

Participating consumers who were recruited by clinical psychologists and registered psychologists received a median of five sessions of care; those who were recruited by GPs received a median of two sessions. Around one fifth of participating consumers recruited by each provider group had not completed treatment (with the remainder either having done so or still receiving care). The sub-samples of consumers for whom outcome data were available had slightly higher median numbers of sessions (six for those recruited by the two groups of psychologists and three for those recruited by GPs), and were more likely to have completed treatment. This was a function of the time frame of the study. Inevitably, some consumers were recruited who did not complete their recommended number of sessions of care. Although we requested that post-treatment outcome data be collected for all consumers at the completion of treatment or the end of the study period, whichever came first, providers were more likely to record post-treatment outcome data for those who had completed treatment. This introduced a bias whereby those for whom outcome data were collected were more likely to have had close to the recommended number of sessions.

The vast majority of participating consumers received cognitive behavioural therapy (CBT) in at least one session, irrespective of the type of provider who recruited them. This was also true for the sub-groups of consumers for whom outcome data were available.

Around two thirds of participating consumers paid a co-payment in at least one session. Again, this pattern held for the sub-groups of consumers for whom outcome data were available.

Table 15: Treatment profiles of consumers seen by clinical psychologists through Better Access

		Participating consumers ¹ (n=289) ²		Participating consumers for whom pre-and post-treatment outcome data were available ¹ (n=205) ²	
		Freq	%	Freq	%
Number of sessions	1	20	7%	0	0%
	2-3	65	22%	37	18%
	4-5	66	23%	44	21%
	6	65	22%	57	28%
	7-12	57	20%	52	25%
	13-18	13	4%	12	6%
	>18	3	1%	3	1%
	(Median)	(5)		(6)	
Treatment completion	Treatment incomplete	47	16%	10	5%
	Treatment completed or ongoing	242	84%	195	95%
Treatment received	Received CBT in at least one session ⁵	251	87%	190	93%
	Received no CBT in any session ⁶	38	13%	15	7%
Copayment	Paid co-payment in at least one session	198	69%	145	71%
	Did not pay co-payment in any session	91	31%	60	29%

1. Received care through Better Access between 1 Oct 2009 and 31 Oct 2010
2. Cells do not always sum to the total n due to some missing data.
3. Includes behavioural interventions and/or cognitive interventions, with or without diagnostic assessment, psycho-education, relaxation strategies, skills training and/or interpersonal therapy.
4. Excludes behavioural interventions and/or cognitive interventions, and includes diagnostic assessment, psycho-education, relaxation strategies, skills training and/or interpersonal therapy.

Table 16: Treatment profiles of consumers seen by registered psychologists through Better Access

		Participating consumers ¹ (n=317) ²		Participating consumers for whom pre-and post-treatment outcome data were available ¹ (n=208) ²	
		Freq	%	Freq	%
Number of sessions	1	23	7%	2	1%
	2-3	78	25%	36	17%
	4-5	82	26%	63	30%
	6	63	20%	49	24%
	7-12	55	17%	44	21%
	13-18	14	4%	13	6%
	>18	1	0%	1	0%
	(Median)	(5)		(6)	
Treatment completion	Treatment incomplete	59	19%	23	11%
	Treatment completed or ongoing	258	81%	185	89%
Treatment received	Received CBT in at least one session ³	286	90%	194	93%
	Received no CBT in any session ⁴	31	10%	14	7%
Copayment	Paid co-payment in at least one session	206	65%	138	66%
	Did not pay co-payment in any session	111	35%	70	34%

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4. Excludes behavioural interventions and/or cognitive interventions, and includes diagnostic assessment, psycho-education, relaxation strategies, skills training and/or interpersonal therapy.

Table 17: Treatment profiles of consumers seen by GPs through Better Access

		Participating consumers ¹ (n=277) ²		Participating consumers for whom pre-and post-treatment outcome data were available ¹ (n=177) ²	
		Freq	%	Freq	%
Number of sessions	1	59	21%	0	0%
	2-3	161	58%	125	71%
	4-5	47	17%	43	24%
	6	6	2%	5	3%
	7-12	4	1%	4	2%
	13-18	0	0%	0	0%
	>18	0	0%	0	0%
	(Median)	(2)		(3)	
Treatment completion	Treatment incomplete	69	25%	38	21%
	Treatment completed or ongoing	208	75%	139	79%
Treatment received	Received CBT in at least one session ³	199	72%	142	80%
	Received no CBT in any session ⁴	78	28%	35	20%
Copayment	Paid co-payment in at least one session	153	55%	113	64%
	Did not pay co-payment in any session	124	45%	64	36%

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3. Includes behavioural interventions and/or cognitive interventions, with or without diagnostic assessment, psycho-education, relaxation strategies, skills training and/or interpersonal therapy.
4. Excludes behavioural interventions and/or cognitive interventions, and includes diagnostic assessment, psycho-education, relaxation strategies, skills training and/or interpersonal therapy.