



## Additional 10 MBS mental health support sessions during COVID-19

The Australian Government temporarily expanded the *Better Access Pandemic Support* measure. The measure provided 10 additional Medicare subsidised psychological therapy sessions for all eligible Australians experiencing a severe or enduring mental health response to the COVID-19 pandemic. This measure was available until 31 December 2022.

Since March 2020, the Government has provided a range of additional measures to support the mental health and wellbeing of Australians impacted by the COVID-19 pandemic.

### Access to an additional 10 Medicare subsidised individual psychological therapy services each calendar year

From 9 October 2020, 10 additional Medicare subsidised individual psychological therapy sessions were available each calendar year. These sessions were for people experiencing severe or enduring mental health impacts from the COVID-19 pandemic, and the measures undertaken to contain it.

The *Better Access Pandemic Support measure* was previously only available to people required to self-isolate or quarantine for a minimum of 14 days or in areas where public health orders restricted movement within the state or territory. From 9 October 2020, these requirements were removed, and the expanded measure was made available nationally until 31 December 2022.

The additional Medicare subsidised sessions were provided through the expansion of the *Better Access to Psychiatrists, Psychologists and General Practitioners through the MBS* (Better Access) initiative. This allowed eligible people to continue to receive mental health care from their psychologist, GP or other eligible allied health worker.

If you were eligible, you could access up to 20 sessions each calendar year from 9 October 2020 to 31 December 2022, under your existing Mental Health Treatment Plan. The Australian Government has designed the process for accessing these sessions to be flexible and consistent with the existing referral process for Better Access.

You were required to see your GP, psychiatrist or paediatrician (reviewing practitioner) to access the additional Better Access sessions. Your reviewing

practitioner could review your Mental Health Treatment plan or use another consultation item to refer you for these sessions.

Your reviewing practitioner would decide how many sessions you could receive in your referral. The maximum number of sessions your reviewing practitioner could state on your referral was:

- 6 initial Better Access sessions
- 10 additional Better Access sessions

You could receive a maximum of 20 individual sessions each calendar year. If you did not use all 10 additional sessions in the calendar year you received the referral, the unused sessions would carry over to the new calendar year. You could then use these sessions before seeing your reviewing practitioner for a new referral.

For example, if you had a referral for 10 additional sessions in 2020, and you only used 6 sessions before 31 December 2020, you could have used this referral to access the 4 remaining sessions in 2021. Once you used all your additional sessions on the referral, you were required to see your GP again to access your initial Better Access sessions.

Allied mental health services which can be provided under Better Access include:

- Psychological Therapy services provided by eligible clinical psychologists;
- Focused Psychological Strategies services provided by eligible GPs, Other Medical Practitioners, registered psychologists, eligible social workers and occupational therapists.

For more information on the expanded *Better Access Pandemic Support* measure and the additional 10 individual COVID-19 Better Access items, please visit [www.health.gov.au](http://www.health.gov.au).

## Where else to get support

### Visit your GP

[www.healthdirect.gov.au/australian-health-services](http://www.healthdirect.gov.au/australian-health-services)

Your GP can refer you to the most appropriate mental health services within the Better Access Scheme.

### Digital Services

[www.headtohealth.gov.au](http://www.headtohealth.gov.au)

Digital health services can be used as an alternative to face-to-face therapies in times of need, or when and where convenient.

## Primary Health Networks

[www.health.gov.au/phn](http://www.health.gov.au/phn)

Primary Health Networks can help you find health services near you as they commission and coordinate services based on local community need.

## headspace

[www.headspace.org.au](http://www.headspace.org.au)

headspace provides young people aged 12 to 25 years old, as well as their families and friends with free or low cost mental health services.

## Head to Health

[www.headtohealth.gov.au](http://www.headtohealth.gov.au)

Anyone can call Head to Health on **1800 595 212** for information, advice and referral to the best mental health service or support according to individual needs.

## 24/7 telephone services offering counselling and support

### Lifeline Australia

13 11 14 [www.lifeline.org.au](http://www.lifeline.org.au)

Lifeline is a crisis support service that provides short-term support at any time for people who are having difficulty coping or staying safe.

### Kids Helpline

1800 551800 [www.kidshelpline.com.au/](http://www.kidshelpline.com.au/)

Kids Helpline is a free, private and confidential 24/7 phone and online counselling service for young people aged 5 to 25 years.

### Beyond Blue

1800 512 348 or at <https://coronavirus.beyondblue.org.au/>

Beyond Blue is available 24/7 by phone or online via chat or email to provide support on a range of mental health issues.

### Suicide Call-Back Service

1300 659 467 [www.suicidecallbackservice.org.au](http://www.suicidecallbackservice.org.au)

For anyone considering suicide, living with someone who is considering suicide, or bereaved by suicide, the Suicide Call Back Service is available.

## **MensLine Australia**

1300 78 9978 [www.mensline.org.au/](http://www.mensline.org.au/)

MensLine Australia is a telephone and online counselling service for men.

## **Open Arms – Veterans & Families Counselling**

1800 011 046

[www.openarms.gov.au](http://www.openarms.gov.au)

Open Arms provides current armed forces personnel, veterans and their families with free and confidential counselling. They also provide group treatment programs, suicide prevention and community and peer network support for mental health and wellbeing.