



# Factsheet for mental health allied health professionals

## Better Access to Psychiatrists, Psychologists and General Practitioners through the Medicare Benefits Schedule (MBS) initiative

Medicare benefits under the *Better Access to Psychiatrists, Psychologists and General Practitioners through the MBS* (Better Access) initiative are available for patients with a diagnosed mental health disorder to receive up to 10 individual and up to 10 group allied mental health services per calendar year.

These services are generally provided in courses of treatment, with each course of treatment involving up to six services provided by an allied mental health professional. At the conclusion of each course of treatment, the allied mental health professional must report back to the referring medical practitioner on the patient's progress and the referring practitioner will assess the patient's need for further services.

Mental health services that can be provided under this initiative include Psychological Therapy services provided by eligible clinical psychologists and Focussed Psychological Strategies (FPS) services provided by eligible General Practitioners (GPs), registered psychologists, eligible social workers and eligible occupational therapists.

MBS benefits for Better Access services are available to patients with a diagnosed mental health disorder who would benefit from a structured approach to the management of their treatment. To receive these services, a patient must be referred by a medical practitioner under either a:

- GP Mental Health Treatment Plan (MHTP); or
- psychiatrist assessment and management plan (PAMP); or
- on direct referral by a psychiatrist or paediatrician.

The conditions classified as mental disorders for the purposes of these services are informed by the World Health Organisation, 1996, Diagnostic and Management Guidelines for Mental Disorders in Primary Care: ICD-10 Chapter V Primary Care Version.

There is no single template for referrals; however, referrals should be signed and dated by the referring practitioner and include the following information:

- Patient's name
- Patient's date of birth
- Patient's address
- Diagnosis
- List of any current medications
- Number of sessions the patient is being referred for (maximum of 6 sessions on an initial referral).

All patients require a current MHTP and a valid referral to claim an MBS benefit for Better Access services from Medicare. A MHTP may be provided to the allied mental health provider with the referral. A MHTP does not expire. A referral is valid until the referred number of sessions have been completed, regardless of whether a patient chooses to change their allied mental health provider.

## Overview of the items

There are 56 MBS items for allied mental health services provided on referral by a GP, psychiatrist or paediatrician:

- Items 80000, 80005, 80010, 80015, 91166, 91167, 91181 and 91182 – Individual Psychological Therapy services provided by a **clinical psychologist**
- Items 80020, 80021, 80022, 80023, 80024, and 80025 – Group Psychological Therapy Services provided by a **clinical psychologist**
- Items 80100, 80105, 80110, 80115, 91169, 91170, 91183 and 91184 – Individual Focussed Psychological Strategies services provided by a **registered psychologist**
- Items 80120, 80122, 80127, 80121\*, 80123\* and 80128\* – Group Focussed Psychological Strategies services provided by a **registered psychologist**
- Items 80125, 80130, 80135, 80140, 91172, 91173, 91185 and 91186 – Individual Focussed Psychological Strategies services provided by an eligible **occupational therapist**
- Items 80145, 80147, 80152, 80146\*, 80148\* and 80153\* – Group Focussed Psychological Strategies Services provided by an eligible **occupational therapist**
- Items 80150, 80155, 80160, 80165, 91175, 91176, 91187 and 91188 – Individual Focussed Psychological Strategies services provided by an eligible **social worker**
- Items 80170, 80172, 80174, 80171\*, 80173\* and 80175\* – Group Focussed Psychological Strategies services provided by an eligible **social worker**

*\*These MBS item numbers are limited to service provision in Modified Monash Model 4-7 locations, refer to the [Group Therapy Factsheet](#) for more information.*

MBS telehealth services introduced on a temporary basis in response to the COVID-19 pandemic were made permanently available from 1 January 2022. This includes:

- 4 Individual Psychological Therapy items for clinical psychologist services; and
- 20 Individual Focussed Psychological Strategies items for services provided by a registered psychologist, eligible occupational therapist or social worker.

Eligible GPs and allied mental health professionals may use only the items relevant to their discipline. Allied mental health professionals may set their own fees; however, patients will only receive the benefit set in the MBS.

## Who can provide these services?

All providers wishing to provide Allied Mental Health Psychological Therapy or FPS services using the Medicare items must be registered with Services Australia as meeting the eligibility requirements of the items. Eligibility criteria are described below.

## Psychological therapy

A person is an allied mental health professional in relation to the provision of a psychological therapy health service if the person:

- holds general registration in the health profession of psychology under the applicable law in force in the state or territory in which the service is provided; and
- is endorsed by the Psychology Board of Australia to practice in clinical psychology.

## Focussed psychological strategies

A person is an allied mental health professional in relation to the provision of a FPS health service if the person meets one of the following requirements:

- The person is a psychologist who is registered without limitation as a person who may provide that kind of service under the applicable law in force in that State or Territory in which the service is provided;
- The person is a member of the Australian Association of Social Workers (AASW) and accredited by AASW as meeting the accreditation criteria for mental health set out in the document published by AASW titled '*AASW Accredited Mental Health Social Worker Application Criteria*' as in force on July 2022.
- The person –
  1. holds registration in the health profession of occupational therapy with the Occupational Therapy Board of Australia; and
  2. is accredited by Occupational Therapy Australia as meeting the criteria for mental health endorsement as set out in the document published by Occupational Therapy Australia titled '*Occupational Therapy Australia Mental Health Endorsement Criteria*' as in force on 1 March 2023.

It is recommended that allied mental health professionals providing FPS services maintain their skill level through continuing professional development (CPD). Eligible Occupational Therapists and Social Workers providing FPS services are required to have completed ten hours annually of CPD relevant to the provision of FPS to maintain their eligibility to access these items.

A series of online one hour FPS CPD modules are available from the Australian Psychological Society, the Australian Association of Social Workers and Occupational Therapy Australia websites to assist providers in completing their FPS CPD requirements.

## What information is required in the report to the referring practitioner?

On completion of a course of treatment (maximum of six services in any one referral but may be less depending on the referral and the patient's clinical need), allied mental health professionals must provide a written report to the referring medical practitioner. The written report must include information on:

- Any assessments carried out on the patient;
- Any treatment provided; and
- Recommendations on future management of the patient's disorder.

A written report must also be provided to the referring medical practitioner at the completion of any subsequent course(s) of treatment provided to the patient.

## Other publicly funded programs

Where an exemption under subsection 19(2) of the *Health Insurance Act 1973* has been granted to an Aboriginal Community Controlled Health Service or State/Territory clinic, the allied mental health items apply for services provided by eligible allied mental health professionals salaried by, or contracted to the service, as long as all requirements of the items are met, including

registration with Services Australia. These services must be bulk billed (that is, the Medicare benefit is accepted as full payment for services).

## Changes to the Better Access Initiative

From 1 January 2022, changes to the MBS telehealth services which were temporarily introduced in response to the COVID-19 pandemic were made permanent. This ensures that eligible Australians can continue to access telehealth (video and telephone), regardless of their location, and where it is safe and clinically appropriate to do so. The same limits with respect to the number of services available in a calendar year still apply.

From 1 November 2022, group therapy MBS items under the Better Access initiative were amended to include:

- 16 new MBS items for group therapy sessions lasting at least 90 minutes or 120 minutes;
- amendments to 8 existing MBS items to reduce the minimum number of patients required to hold a group therapy session from 6 to 4; and
- allowing all group therapy MBS items to be claimed with only 3 patients, if 4 patients were scheduled to attend but one patient does not attend (for example, due to unforeseen circumstances).

More information on Group Therapy MBS Changes can be found on [MBS online](#).

## Further information

Further information is available at [www.health.gov.au](http://www.health.gov.au) or by calling Services Australia on 132 150 (for providers) or 132 011 (for patients).

Allied Health Providers should refer to the item descriptors and explanatory notes on [MBS online](#).

Australian Psychological Society – [www.psychology.org.au](http://www.psychology.org.au)

Australian Association of Social Workers (AASW) - [www.aasw.asn.au](http://www.aasw.asn.au)

Occupational Therapy Australia – [www.otaus.com.au](http://www.otaus.com.au)