Additional 10 MBS mental health support sessions during COVID-19

The Australian Government is expanding the Better Access Pandemic Support measure. The measure now provides 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 will be available until 30 June 2022.

This announcement builds on the Government’s unprecedented support to ensure the mental health and wellbeing of Australians is protected during and after the COVID-19 pandemic.

Since March 2020, the Government has announced a number of emergency response measures to support the mental health and wellbeing of Australians impacted by the COVID-19 pandemic. Under these packages, the Government introduced or scaled up a number of services to support early intervention and vulnerable groups.

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 each calendar year are available. These sessions are 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 will be removed and the expanded measure will be available nationally until 30 June 2022.

The additional Medicare subsidised sessions are provided through the expansion of the Better Access to Psychiatrists, Psychologists and General Practitioners through the MBS (Better Access) initiative. This will allow eligible people to continue to receive mental health care from their psychologist, GP or other eligible allied health worker.
If you are eligible, you can access up to 20 sessions each calendar year from 9 October 2020 to 30 June 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 need to see your GP, psychiatrist or paediatrician (reviewing practitioner) to access the additional Better Access sessions. Your reviewing practitioner can review your Mental Health Treatment plan or use another consultation item to refer you for these sessions.

Your reviewing practitioner will decide how many sessions you can receive in your referral. The maximum number of sessions your reviewing practitioner can state on your referral is:

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

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

For example, if you have a referral for 10 additional sessions in 2020, and you only use 6 sessions before 31 December 2020, you can use this referral to access the 4 remaining sessions in 2021. Once you have used all your additional sessions on the referral, you need 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;
- Focussed Psychological Strategies services provided by eligible GPs, Other Medical Practitioners, registered psychologists, eligible social workers and occupational therapists.

Where else to get support

Visit your GP


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

Digital Services


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


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.

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


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

Open Arms – Veterans & Families Counselling
1800 011 046
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.