

## AASW calls for increase in Medicare mental health sessions, publishes guidance for GPs to refer to mental health social workers

The AASW renews its call for an increase in Medicare Benefits Scheme (MBS)-funded mental health sessions in response to COVID 19, said National President Christine Craik. “COVID 19 is having significant impacts in the health and wellbeing of all Australians and we will continue to see the effects for months if not years to come. It is clear now that people need short and long-term mental health supports that are responsive to their needs.” The AASW has joined other key stakeholders in consistently calling for an increase in allowable mental health sessions. Accredited Mental Health Social Workers (AMHSWs) who provide mental health supports through Medicare know that the current limit of 10 sessions only are not enough for many people. The AASW is calling for an immediate extension of MBS funded sessions from the current 10 sessions allowable per year to at least 20 sessions for the foreseeable future. “Increasing the number of sessions will allow mental health professionals to better support individuals to work through the anxiety and complicated presentations we are seeing at this time. Accredited Mental Health Social Workers (AMHSWs) have reported instances of their clients rationing their sessions despite significant concerns about their mental health and a worsening of symptoms as this pandemic continues. Social workers have reported observing an increase in service users presenting with suicidal thoughts and concerning behaviours. This is not surprising given the current circumstances, however supporting someone through this is difficult with the limited number of sessions available at the present time. “People are experiencing heightened anxiety with this pandemic, due to many stressors including, loss of income, financial pressure, isolation, uncertainty about the future and for some, dealing with this alongside existing mental health issues. We are seeing an increase in incidents of family violence and worsening drug and alcohol abuse. It is clear that if we are to work to support the mental health of Australians through this pandemic and into recovery, there needs to be adequate service provision.” The federal government’s MBS review has identified the need for an increased number of sessions and the AASW looks forward to continuing to work with government on this issue alongside addressing pay parity for all mental health professionals who are undertaking the same work. Ms Craik said, “As stated in our numerous submissions to the inquiry, we believe MBS Better Access needs to be based on need and level of complexity.” One size does not fit all. There are 2,200 AMHSWs who are already supporting people through this current crisis but to be able to address ongoing and complex mental health concerns, there needs to be an increase in the number of sessions available to individuals. AMHSWs are working with GPs to address community mental health issues during this difficult time. AASW has created a COVID-19 flyer for GPs to help refer patients to an Accredited Mental Health Social Worker. Find out more on AASW’s GP webpage and download it today.

### **Contacts**

Angela Yin  
03 9320 1005  
mailto: media@asw.asn.au