

More incentives to GPs to help mental health patients

The Commonwealth Government has removed the cap on the number of Service Incentive Payments that can be claimed by a General Practitioner. It is hoped this will encourage more GPs to take part in the Better Outcomes in Mental Health Care Program and increase community access to quality primary mental health services.

The mental health incentive payment has been available to GPs through the Practice Incentives program for the past four years. About 20 percent of GPs undertook additional mental health education and training and registered with Medicare Australia to participate in the program. The 3 Step Mental Health Process requires GPs to: undertake initial mental health assessments of their patients; develop written mental health plans; and review the progress of their patients against the mental health plans.

In addition to the normal Medicare consultation payments, on completion of the third step, GPs received a Service Incentive Payment of \$150. A cap of 67 Service Incentive Payments per GP per year was intended to encourage a large pool of GPs to provide mental health services, rather than creating a group of GPs specializing in this area. While only a small number of GPs have reached the cap, the government has decided to remove it to support GPs who are focusing on mental health care and to encourage more GPs to take part.