



RESPONSES TO QUESTIONS TAKEN ON NOTICE

Hearing Date: 29 April 2022

Directed to: Tegan Carrison

1. Ms Ward Page no. 74-75

Question asked:

Ms WARD: I am interested to hear from the three of you, if you can just expand a little bit more, on the challenges we have seen within the mental health workforce in terms of working environment, their own mental health challenges and what scaffolding, what supports, can be there to support this workforce.

Ms CARRISON: I just wanted to ask if we can take this aspect on notice, because we do have some wonderful information and statistics about the mental health of psychologists and those risk factors, the burnout and things like that, so I would love the opportunity to take that on notice and provide that detailed information later on.

Response:

COVID-19 posed many challenges to psychologists including but not limited to:

- Increased demand for services.
- Increased workload.
- General escalation in client mental health conditions requiring either increased duration or frequency of treatment.
- Increased personal stress and family commitments such as closure of schools and needing to care for children.
- Needing to rapidly pivot to alternative methods of delivery (telehealth).
- Financial pressures due to client cancellations, inability to delivery services via telehealth (not all services or client groups are suitable for telehealth).
- Access to and additional cost of PPE, cleaning products and rapid antigen tests.
- Increased administration and managements costs that could not be compensated for.
- At times contradictory information provided by dedicated Government helplines and websites.
- Limited access to timely and clear guidance regarding PPE and face-to-face service limitations.

During our Private Practice survey in November 2021, we asked several questions to establish the challenges and risk factors for burnout facing psychologists. Some of the areas of note include:



- 49% of psychologists were working more than the previous year (2020). This was on top of a 59% increase in 2020 from pre-pandemic levels.
- Psychologists reported that 61% of clients required more sessions than the same time last year.
- 82% reported that their clients were exhibiting more distress, anxiety or depression than the same time as last year.
- 45% of psychologists were unsure of their current and near future obligations regarding COVID-19 safe practices.
- Regarding work and life satisfaction and balance, only 45% were satisfied with their rate of remuneration and 47% felt they had an adequate work/life balance.
- When questioned about the state of their health, 20% reported less than satisfactory physical health.
- When asked directly about mental health, 43% of psychologists reported their mental health had declined compared to last year.
- 69% of psychologists reported feeling nervous to some degree, 37% reported some degree of hopelessness, 57% reported feelings of restlessness, 17 % reported feelings of depression, 72% reported that everything felt like an effort, and 16% felt a degree of worthlessness.
- 40% of respondents were seeking help to deal with their thoughts and feelings.

These are very concerning trends and require urgent and joint action between AAPi, Government and other stakeholders.

Solutions:

- Dedicated liaison personnel within the Department of Health available for Allied Health Sector peak bodies, for timely responses to questions related to sector guidance and public health orders.
- AAPi would like to work with the Victorian Government to develop an online system where clients and health professionals can easily identify current availability of psychologists. This would have made a significant difference for Victorians in making help-seeking easier, and making sure that there is a psychologist available for each client. And this serves a purpose beyond the pandemic, especially when being able to connect with a psychologist in any location via telehealth will support patients who face long waiting lists to see a psychologist.
- We need to address the massive workforce shortages of psychologists by:
 - increasing funded psychology places at universities
 - utilising the 7,500 provisional psychologists in Australia to ease the strain on the workforce and reduce the current client waiting lists
 - funded supervision for current provisional psychologists
 - establishing more funded provisional psychology positions, including in the public and private sectors.
 - establishing a provisional psychology Medicare rebate
- Extend initiatives available to GPs to regional, rural and remote psychologists to increase the rural workforce and maintain practice viability.



- Develop the equivalent of [Drs4Drs](#) for psychologists- Drs4Drs is funded by Ahpra (the Medical Board of Australia) and the Federal Government and managed by AMA.
- Funded self-care and burnout prevention activities for the mental health workforce.
- Access to PHN PPE when commercial supplies are not available.
- Access to funding to improve the safety of workplaces- filtration devices, PPE, cleaning supplies, rapid antigen tests.