



6 November, 2019

Response by the eating disorder sector to SMH/Age article on Medicare Reform for Eating Disorders, 30 October 2019

We are writing to raise some serious concerns around inaccurate reporting in relation to the new Medicare item numbers for eating disorders. We represent a network of eating disorders agencies across Australia, including Butterfly Foundation, Eating Disorders Queensland (EDQ), Eating Disorders Victoria (EDV), Eating Disorders Families Australia (EDFA), Bridges Eating Disorders Association of Western Australia and the Australia and New Zealand Academy for Eating Disorders (ANZAED). Our agencies have delivered frontline services and advocated for carers and individuals impacted by eating disorders, at a grass roots and systemic level, for more than 20 years, and represent professionals working in the field, as well as those with a lived experience of an eating disorder and the people who care for them.

The article was incorrect and unfortunately caused a great deal of dismay within the eating disorder community – consumers, carers, clinicians and others working in this sector. It is critical to note that the new Medicare item numbers represent a significant reform and improvement for Australians living with eating disorders.

Most importantly, there has been no change to those who can provide eating disorders treatment services under Medicare, or to which professionals are eligible to treat people with an eating disorder under Medicare. A professional holding a current provider number can deliver services under the new item numbers.

The Butterfly Foundation has been instrumental in getting this Medicare reform over the line. **Kevin Barrow, CEO, Butterfly Foundation** said, “This is a monumental reform in treatment in Australia and is a significant milestone for the one million Australians living with an eating disorder.

“The Medicare reform has been designed with input from leading clinicians from a number of disciplines. The Australia & New Zealand Academy for Eating Disorders (ANZAED) along with colleagues across Australia in State-based eating disorder training organisations, are continuing to build capacity across the workforce in Australia to treat eating disorders so that MBS services are provided by qualified and eligible practitioners with the knowledge, skills and experience to provide effective treatment to patients with eating disorders,” he said.



Dr Kim Hurst, ANZAED President said that: “The Australia & New Zealand Academy for Eating Disorders (ANZAED) acknowledges that specialist training and experience is the key to managing these complex conditions, and this can be provided by a number of mental health professions in order to provide a high standard of care as well as the broadest access to treatment for these conditions that affect over a million Australians. ANZAED is working with the National Eating Disorders Collaboration (NEDC) to develop a credentialing system for eating disorder practitioners to support professionals and the community to be confident in receiving the highest standard of treatment, with evidence-based practices as specified in the Medicare guidelines. ANZAED applauds the government in this life saving initiative.”

Belinda Chelius, General Manager of Eating Disorders Queensland (EDQ), echoes ANZAED’s statement adding, “As an organisation that has employed a multi-disciplinary team for over 20 years, we feel strongly that taking an elitist approach to deciding which professional disciplines can support people with eating disorders is scare mongering, completely unfounded and leaves the clients with fewer choices and fewer practitioners. EDQ will work with NEDC to guide training, credentialing and ongoing support for clinicians across the disciplines of Social Work, Psychology, Dietetics and Occupational Therapy.”

Belinda Caldwell, CEO, Eating Disorders Victoria highlights this need further: “People with eating disorders and their carers just want ready access to the best treating team to help them or their loved one recover. Clinicians on their team should be trained in evidence-based models of treatment, be person centric, recovery focussed, family/carers inclusive, and collaborate well with other health professionals. Medicare recognises the range of health professionals that can effectively provide this much needed service.”

Commenting on behalf of **Eating Disorders Families Australia (EDFA)**, David Quilty said: “The additional Medicare funded consultations are warmly welcomed by carers of people with eating disorders. From our lived experiences, we know that people with eating disorders require intensive ongoing care and support. Too often, families are left significantly out-of-pocket or have no choice but to forego medical care. This important reform will provide enhanced, more affordable access to health professionals such as psychologists and dietitians who are a vital part of the multidisciplinary team for people with eating disorders and their carers.”

Jemma Caswell, the Co-President of the Bridges Eating Disorders Association of WA emphasises the need in remote and rural communities for services, stating that “across Australia, but particularly in isolated States such as Western Australia, there is a severe lack of appropriate evidence-based services available for those experiences eating disorders, and their carers. Those services which are available usually have huge waitlists which effects the potential for timely intervention. The new Medicare items being available to a range a



qualified mental health professional will ensure that more people will be appropriately trained and access to treatment greatly improved as a result.”

We encourage all state governments to keep funding their respective NGOs who deliver life-saving services to individuals and carers and support an integrated model of service between State and Commonwealth systems, preventing vulnerable people falling through service delivery gaps due to eligibility and financial constraints.

As representatives of the eating disorder sector, we urge the choice of wise action grounded in reflection to provide over a million Australians with eating disorders the best-possible integrated, ethical, multiple-disciplinary, evidence-based treatment that they so desperately need and deserve.

Yours sincerely,

Australia & New Zealand Academy for Eating Disorders (ANZAED)
Bridges Eating Disorders Association of WA
Butterfly Foundation
Eating Disorders Families Australia (EDFA)
Eating Disorders Queensland (EDQ)
Eating Disorders Victoria (EDV)