

SUBMISSION TO PRODUCTIVITY COMMISSION INQUIRY INTO MENTAL HEALTH 2019

A grassroots real perspective from a family member

A member of my family has lived experience of mental illness and I wish to maintain their privacy by referring to them as "G".

There are so many aspects of a person's mental health journey. An aspect of mental health that is not often discussed is the financial aspect. When "G" was in their teens they were referred to a psychologist. This was before the Mental Health Plan came into being and we, as parents weren't always able to afford to pay for visits to a psychologist. Fast forward to now, many years later, yes with the Mental Health Plan you can access 5 – 10 visits to a psychologist, which is a big help.

Often there is a need to also see a psychiatrist. A psychiatrist formerly bulk billed "G", however after a period of "feeling better" and not seeing this psychiatrist "G" felt it would be helpful to see them again, only to be told that the psychiatrist wasn't taking "new" patients, even though they had been a client of theirs for a couple of years. "G" was unable to find a bulk billing psychiatrist!

When "G" was unwell and needed somewhere safe to go because they felt suicidal. The only place available was a Psych Ward in the nearby hospital, but they were given medication and "thrown" out the next morning!! At that immediate time, when feeling so unwell, there was nowhere else to go! A place to stay for a few days, to be listened to by a professional who cared (without drugging you up) and offering some realistic support would have been helpful.

Anxiety and/or panic attacks often occurred but waiting in an Emergency Hospital waiting room or a 24 hour medical centre waiting room was not an ideal situation and "G" would often leave before help was given.

Not enough services are bulk billed. If you have private health insurance there is more respect and support for the unwell person, in a safe environment.

When "G" was unwell it was difficult to hold down a job and some days it was difficult to get out of bed. There is still so much stigma if you have a mental illness and the unwell person is reluctant to tell their employer of their "invisible" illness.

Accessing services can be difficult if someone is unwell, if they can't hold down a job money is not always available to pay for petrol to get to an appointment, or to pay for prescription(s).

Being unwell mentally can impact on all aspects of a person's quality of life, including physical health, as does inability to sleep due to stress and anxiety, which is often the case.

Diagnosis of a specific mental illness can be difficult as there are many factors involved.

"G" has been on medication for many years. At times "G" has tried to come off the medication, with her doctor's consent (unsuccessfully). Slowly reducing the medication is supposed to be the best way to come off medication. However the tablets in question weren't available in a smaller "mg" dose. The tablets were cut by "G" and smaller dose was taken (even though it was advised not to cut the tablets) but the "zapping" and side effects were too much to come off this particular medication.

If mentally unwell, it is not only difficult to hold down a job, but also difficult to have a long term relationship. More support is needed for single parents (with mental illness) of young children.

I would be happy to participate in meaningful public consultations to add my voice to the real issues.