



**Australian Government**  
**Department of Health and Ageing**

**FACT SHEET**

Better Access to Psychiatrists, Psychologists and General Practitioners through the Medicare Benefits Schedule (Better Access) initiative

**IMPLEMENTATION OF MENTAL HEALTH SKILLS TRAINING FOR GENERAL PRACTITIONERS: 2009-10 BUDGET MEASURE**

**Budget measure description**

The 2009 -10 Budget included the following changes to the Better Access initiative in relation to the development of Mental Health Treatment Plans for people with a diagnosed mental disorder:

1. Changing the name of the “GP Mental Health Care Plan” to “GP Mental Health Treatment Plan” to better reflect what it is intended to do (from 1 July 2009);
2. requiring that GPs document a diagnosis of a mental disorder in the Plan (from 1 July 2009); and
3. introducing a new Medicare item for GPs who have not completed Mental Health Skills training (from 1 January 2010).

Components 1 and 2 were implemented from 1 July 2009.

**New MBS item for Mental Health Skills training**

From 1 January 2010, a new schedule fee Medicare item of \$125.95 will be introduced for GPs who have not undertaken accredited Mental Health Skills Training.

Those GPs who have undertaken the training accredited by the General Practice Mental Health Standards Collaboration (GPMHSC) since the commencement of the Better Outcomes in Mental Health Care program on 1 July 2001 will continue to be able to access the current schedule fee of \$156.85 for developing a Mental Health Treatment Plan under MBS item 2710.

Completion of Mental Health Skills Training assists GPs to better diagnose and develop Plans for people who have a mental disorder, and identify those who may need general counselling to help them deal with situational distress such as grief or relationship counselling and refer them appropriately.

Those GPs who have not completed the training will still be able to refer patients to allied mental health professionals in line with current arrangements. However, they will access the lower schedule fee for doing so.

## **What is Mental Health Skills Training?**

Mental Health Skills Training is an interactive course which focuses on assessment, planning and review cycle of common mental health conditions and the development of Mental Health Treatment Plans in the context of the Better Access initiative. It must have consumer and carer involvement in the development, planning and review of the course.

Mental Health Skills Training requires a minimum of 6 continuous hours training in a GPMHSC accredited course. It can be done face to face in a day, or completed online in modules. This training is widely available and there are a number of existing courses accredited by the GPMHSC.

The GPMHSC already accredits Mental Health Skills Training for GPs and will be responsible for maintaining records and advising Medicare Australia of those GPs who have undertaken the training and are therefore eligible for the higher Medicare schedule fee when developing Mental Health Treatment Plans.

Under the Better Outcomes in Mental Health Care Program, Mental Health Skills Training was called Level 1 training. Over the last few years the name has changed to Mental Health Skills Training.

## **How can I find out what Mental Health Skills Training courses are available in my area?**

There are a number of ways to find available Mental Health Skills Training courses. You could visit the GPMHSC's find training page at [www.gpmhsc.org.au](http://www.gpmhsc.org.au), or contact the GPMHSC on (03) 8699 0554 or your College or local Division of General Practice.

## **What if I have already completed Mental Health Skills Training?**

If you have completed a GPMHSC accredited Mental Health Skills Training course since 1 July 2001 (previously known as level 1 mental health skills training) and your attendance at this course has been registered with the GPMHSC, you do not need to do this training again to qualify for the higher rebate. However, continuing professional development (CPD) mental health skills training is strongly encouraged.

If you are unsure whether you have completed Mental Health Skills Training, you should contact the GPMHSC to check whether you have done so on (03) 8699 0554 or at [gpmhsc@racgp.org.au](mailto:gpmhsc@racgp.org.au).

## **What if I have not undertaken Mental Health Skills Training but consider I have obtained requisite skills through other training pathways?**

Any GP who has undertaken accredited Mental Health Skills Training since 1 July 2001 will not be required to do so again to continue to access the higher rebate. However, in addition to completing this Mental Health Skills training, all GPs are encouraged to further maintain their competencies by undertaking CPD in mental health.

Any GP who considers that they have gained the requisite mental health skills through other training pathways, including tertiary qualifications, can apply to the GPMHSC for individual recognition of their prior learning. You should contact the GPMHSC on (03) 8699 0554 or at [gpmhsc@racgp.org.au](mailto:gpmhsc@racgp.org.au) to discuss an application.

**If I am a Fellow of the Royal Australian College of General Practitioners or the Australian College of Rural and Remote Medicine am I still required to do the Mental Health Skills Training?**

All GPs who have not undertaken a GPMHSC accredited Mental Health Skills Training course will be required to do so in order to access the higher schedule fee. This includes Fellows of the Royal Australian College of General Practitioners or the Australian College of Rural and Remote Medicine.

**How will Medicare Australia know which item number I can claim?**

By 31 December 2009, the GPMHSC will provide Medicare Australia a list of those GPs who have completed the requisite training and are therefore eligible to access the higher schedule fee. Those GPs who are not on this list will only be able to access the lower schedule fee.

The GPMHSC will continue to advise Medicare Australia on a monthly basis the names of GPs who have completed accredited Mental Health Skills training after 31 December 2009.

**What if I am currently a registered provider of Focussed Psychological Strategies (level 2 trained GP)?**

GPs who have already completed Focussed Psychological Strategies (FPS) skills training (previously known as level 2 Mental Health Skills Training) in order to provide FPS services themselves have already completed Mental Health Skills Training as a prerequisite to this course. They will not be required to undertake Mental Health Skills Training again to continue to access the higher rebate.

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If you have any queries, please contact Bernadette Blenkiron in the Department of Health and Ageing on (02) 6289 8826 or: [bernadette.blenkiron@health.gov.au](mailto:bernadette.blenkiron@health.gov.au)

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