

## GP Advisory Committee (GPAC) in Focus: Access to Allied Psychological Services (ATAPS) Program

### Highlight - 18 July meeting

NBMPHN Mental Health Manager (Service Coordination), Liz Welch, advised GPAC that the Department of Health (DoH) no longer funds ATAPS specifically. While funding has moved to a flexible arrangement, it was acknowledged that the existing ATAPS program was very successful and highly regarded in our region.

Services now need to be delivered as part of a stepped care approach to primary mental health care. Limited funding, matched with a high level of need, requires an adjustment to the range and type of services provided by NBMPHN. DoH guidelines for psychological services stipulate that Low Income in itself is not enough for a patient to qualify for a separate service.

Independent consultant, John Leary, facilitated a discussion with GPAC members.

### GP feedback

Low-intensity services (including online services):

- Some GPs currently refer patients to low-intensity services while waiting to see a psychologist.
- However, concerns were raised that low-intensity mental health interventions were not well accessed and GPs were not given appropriate feedback regarding patient progress.
- Low intensity care was considered unsuitable for many people, especially vulnerable patients who require more regular monitoring and support. Left unsupported they may deteriorate.
- Concerns were raised that funding would be diverted into low-intensity mental health and use up all the funding.
- If patients are referred to low intensity-care, there needs to be feedback to the GP so they do not get lost in the system.

Clinical triage as part of the intake for referrals:

- GPs believe that they already do a good job assessing the level of care that patients need, rendering additional clinical triage as unnecessary.
- Concerns were expressed that a GP's assessment could be overruled by Clinical Triage.

Health Care Card:

- Members commented they did not like the criteria of the Health Care Card, believing that some patients not on a Health Care Card were still financially disadvantaged.
- However, there was acceptance of the need for some rationing of services.

Consultations in each of the four Local Government Areas with key stakeholders: GPS, Allied Health service providers, and consumers and carers were held for the last week in July and first week in August.

From the consultations, a new service model will be developed.