

Clinical Psychology in Australia

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Clinical psychology in Australia has a fraught history, having experienced rolling attacks from within the psychology profession that have threatened to undermine the existence and value of education and training in clinical psychology.

From its inception as a specialised field in the mid-1960s, clinical psychology came under attack from other psychologists who claimed that separate recognition was unnecessary, that clinical psychologists had laid claim to skills that all psychologists possessed, and that such delineation did not recognise the personal qualities required of a clinician. These same claims are a driving force within the profession today.

During the 1970s, and again in 2006, the Australian Government, offered to provide rebates for clinical psychology services under our national health insurance scheme, Medicare. On both occasions, the Australian Psychological Society (APS) was the only national body that differentiated clinical psychologists from other psychologists, via the entry criteria for their College of Clinical Psychologists. At these times, the APS refused to accept the Government offer unless all psychologists were included in the rebate system.

In 2006, the Government added psychology services to the Medical Benefits Schedule (MBS) under Medicare, implementing a two-tiered model, where clinical psychologists were allocated a higher rebate than other psychologists. Membership of the APS College of Clinical Psychologists was the criteria for access to the higher rebate. Following this, the APS executive revoked the College's authority to establish and maintain entry standards to the College and undertook to admit psychologists that had undertaken training in non-clinical areas of psychology or unaccredited professional development they considered adequate. Professional psychology shattered.

The Australian Clinical Psychology Association (ACPA) was formed to uphold standards for clinical psychology and provide transparency for the public. Subsequently, a proliferation of organisations of psychologists has arisen, each claiming equivalence of education and training in mental health to clinical psychologists and demanding the higher MBS rebate. The current push by groups representing non-clinical psychologists is for a single-tier model of rebates.

Contextually, Australia holds the lowest standards of education and training of psychologists for registration or licensure in the world. A brief description of the requirements in Australia for registration as a psychologist will be provided.