

Title: Small Voices Can Be Heard: The strategy that saved government funding for a mental health initiative in Australia.



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Abstract:

In 2010, with no prior warning and only six weeks until implementation, life was going to drastically change for clients with high prevalence mental health disorders who were referred by their family doctor to treatment from private Occupational Therapists or Social Workers instead of Psychologists under the Australian Government's "Better Access to Mental Health (BAMH)" scheme. From the 1st April, there would no longer be a rebate available for such services, leaving the only source of private mental health care to be subsidised by the government to be via Psychiatrists or Psychologists.

This change would mean the effective end of private mental health occupational therapy practices across the country and, thus also the end of intervention that met the needs of clients whose mental health conditions were non-responsive to the approaches of Psychiatry and Psychology, but very much responsive to an occupational wellbeing approach to intervention. Typically these clients were 'too well' to access help available from the public mental health service and were going to be left without suitable intervention.

This is the story of our fight – clients, clinicians and referral sources acting together - to reverse the decision and retain the rebate across all the established mental health professions.

This is the story of a small profession, consisting of mainly quiet, hardworking women and men, finding their voice on a national level and starting to use it to shape health delivery both now and into the future.

Christine Coop is the Senior Occupational Therapist and creator of Enable Occupational Therapy in Mental Health Pty Ltd., a Cairns-based practice established to enable people with mental health, and complex health and disability challenges to build lives worth living. In addition to her one-on-one clinical work, Christine's expertise has seen her develop life-changing programs to prevent burnout and to expand the on-the-ground effectiveness for clients, parents, carers, employers and service providers in dealing with issues of mental health self-care, and a variety of mental health, cognitive, and social disability areas. In 2010, she was the Queensland representative on the BART ("Better Access" Response Team) – the team that led the fight to retain "Better Access to Mental Health" rebates for clients of occupational therapists.