



AUSTRALIAN ASSOCIATION
of PSYCHOLOGISTS INC

AAPI 2025 FEDERAL ELECTION MEMBER ADVOCACY PRIORITIES

Survey conducted March 2025

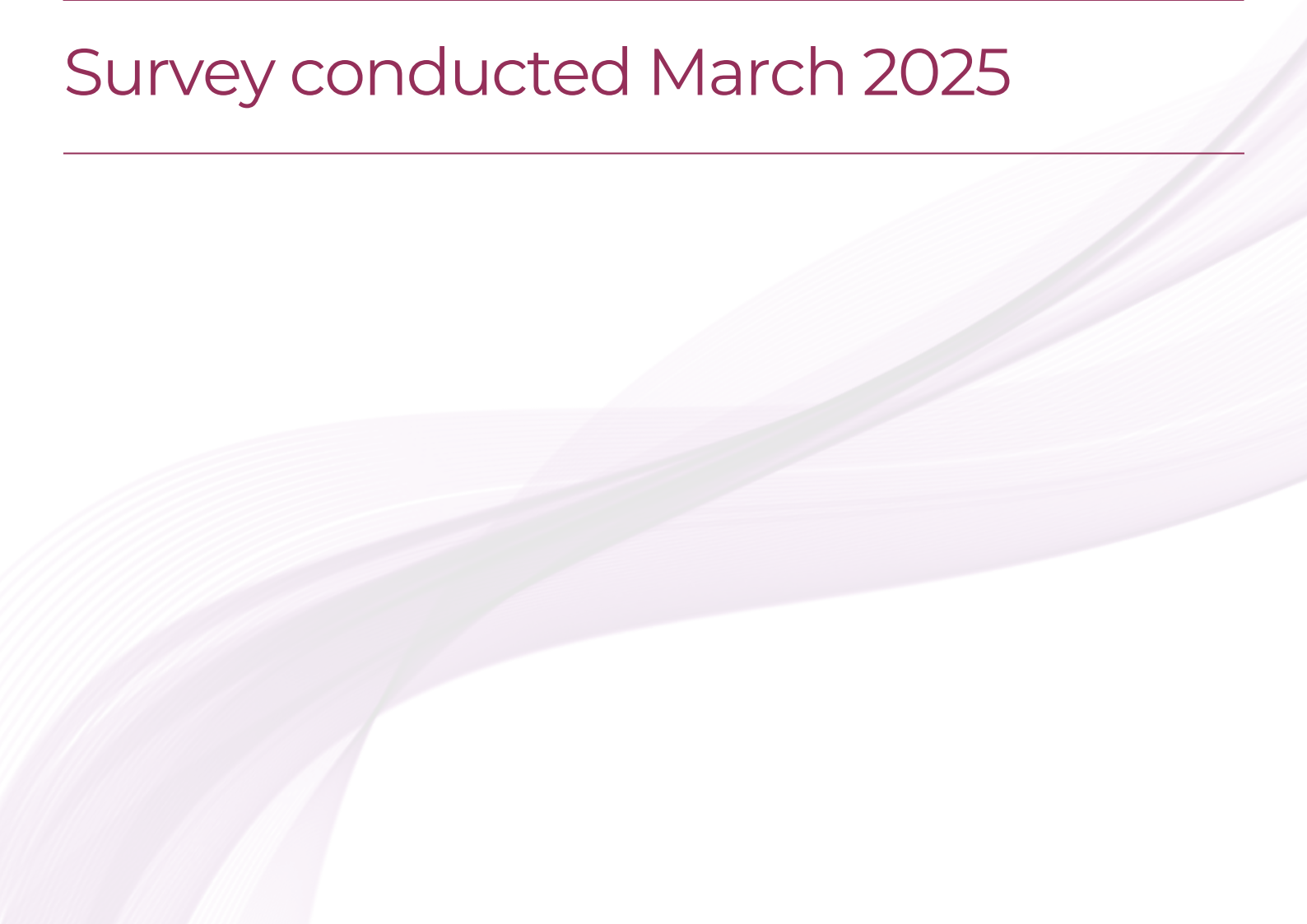


Table of Contents

- 01** Executive Summary
- 02** Key Findings
- 03** Key Challenges and Concerns
- 04** Final Recommendations
- 05** Full Research Findings

Executive Summary



“The Australian Association of Psychologists Inc. (AAPi) conducted the 2025 Federal Election Member Advocacy Priorities Survey to identify key issues impacting psychologists and their clients across Australia. The survey results of over 1,000 respondents provide critical insights into the challenges facing the profession and the necessary policy reforms to ensure equitable access to psychological services.

Psychologists across the country reported concerns about funding limitations, workforce sustainability, and the need for structural changes to mental health policy. The responses highlight a mental health system struggling under the weight of cost, capacity constraints, geographic inequities, and systemic inefficiencies.

As the peak body for all psychologists, AAPi calls on all parties in the upcoming Australian federal election to take immediate action on these priorities by backing structural reforms that will improve access, reduce inequality and sustain our workforce into the future.”

Tegan Carrison, Executive Director
Australian Association of Psychologists Inc (AAPi)

90%

Rated federal funding for psychology and mental health as inadequate



86%

Support increasing Better Access sessions

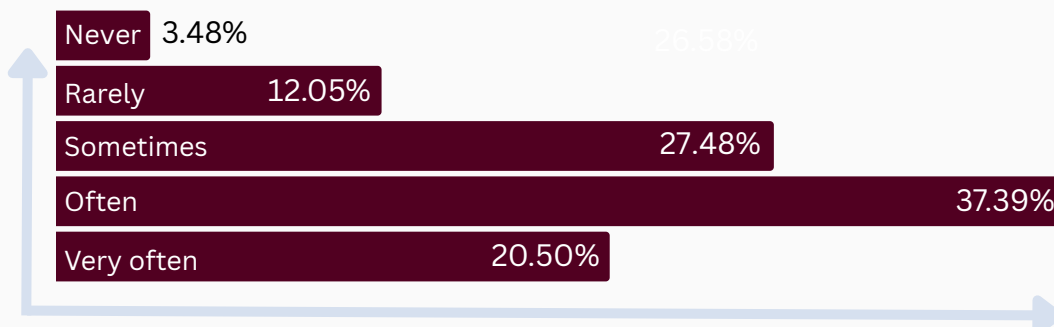


90%

Support increasing Medicare rebates



If you work in private practice, how often do you have to turn away or delay seeing clients due to financial barriers?



“Many of our clients are not just anxious – they are traumatised, isolated, and unsupported.”

Key Findings



1. Costs are too high for clients

Psychological services are increasingly out of reach for Australians on low incomes. Many flagged the limited number of rebated Medicare sessions and high out-of-pocket costs as a critical barrier.

Members consistently advocated for a substantial increase in the Medicare rebate, with the majority recommending a minimum of \$150 per session.



2. 10 Better Access sessions per year are not enough

There was a strong consensus that the current 10 Medicare-funded sessions per year are grossly inadequate, particularly for clients with complex, chronic, or high-risk presentations. Respondents called for:

- A return to 20 sessions per year.
- Unlimited or flexible session allocations, based on clinical need and GP/psychologist recommendations.
- Less administrative burden on both GPs and psychologists in managing referrals and re-referrals



3. Lack of equity and access across Medicare, NDIS and DVA

A systemic review across Medicare, NDIS, DVA and public settings is urgently needed to end the financial disadvantage for patients.

Across Medicare, NDIS, DVA, and the public sector, clinical endorsement is often irrationally given a higher rebate, despite proven equal outcomes from generally registered psychologists. A cross-system review of rebate and recognition structures will immediately open up access to a greater pool of psychologists, at a time of dire shortages and escalating mental health needs.

The most frequently cited concern among psychologists was the two-tier system, imposed by Medicare. Members described this system as:

- Discriminatory and divisive, undermining the skills and experience of generally registered psychologists.
- Financially detrimental to both practitioners and clients, due to lower rebates for services by non-endorsed psychologists.
- Damaging to professional unity, creating confusion among clients and stakeholders, and reducing access to care.

Many called for a single rebate for all psychologists, recognising general registration as equivalent in terms of its therapeutic efficacy and professional competence.

A rebate review needs to extend to private practice, public care, DVA and the NDIS, to ensure that psychologists are appropriately recognised and utilised.

Key Findings

4. The future workforce feels unsupported

Workforce concerns featured prominently, with repeated calls to:

- Expand postgraduate training places, especially for Masters' programs beyond the clinical endorsement track.
- Reinstate or improve alternative pathways to registration (e.g. 4+2 or 5+1 pathways).
- Offer paid placements and internships, particularly to support provisional psychologists and increase rural access.
- Allow provisional psychologists to provide Medicare-rebated services under supervision, to expand access and job opportunities.



Key Challenges and Concerns

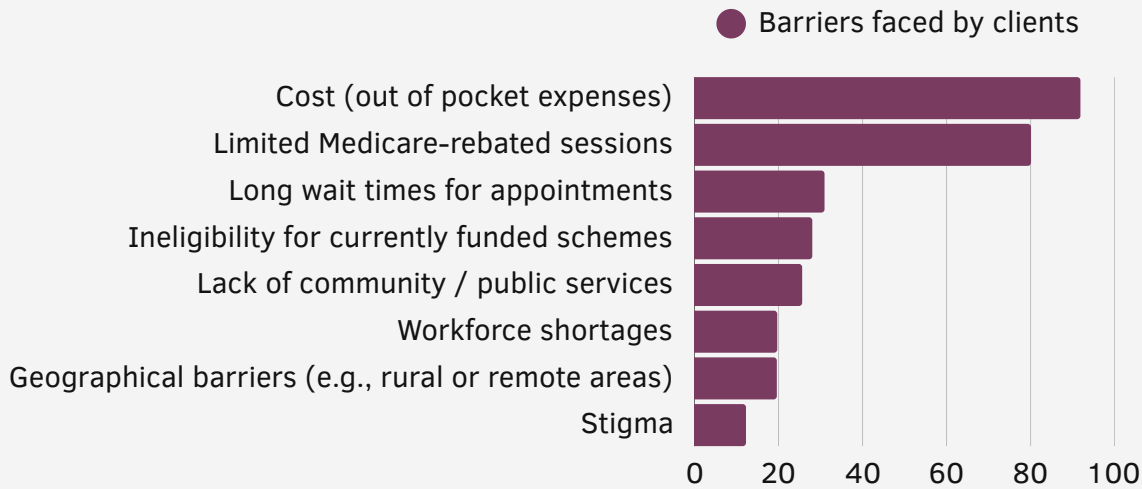
03



Key challenge 1: Cost

Cost is the number one barrier clients face when accessing psychology services (92%), followed by limited rebated Medicare sessions 80%.

Psychologists are frequently forced to turn away or delay care for clients due to high out-of-pocket costs.



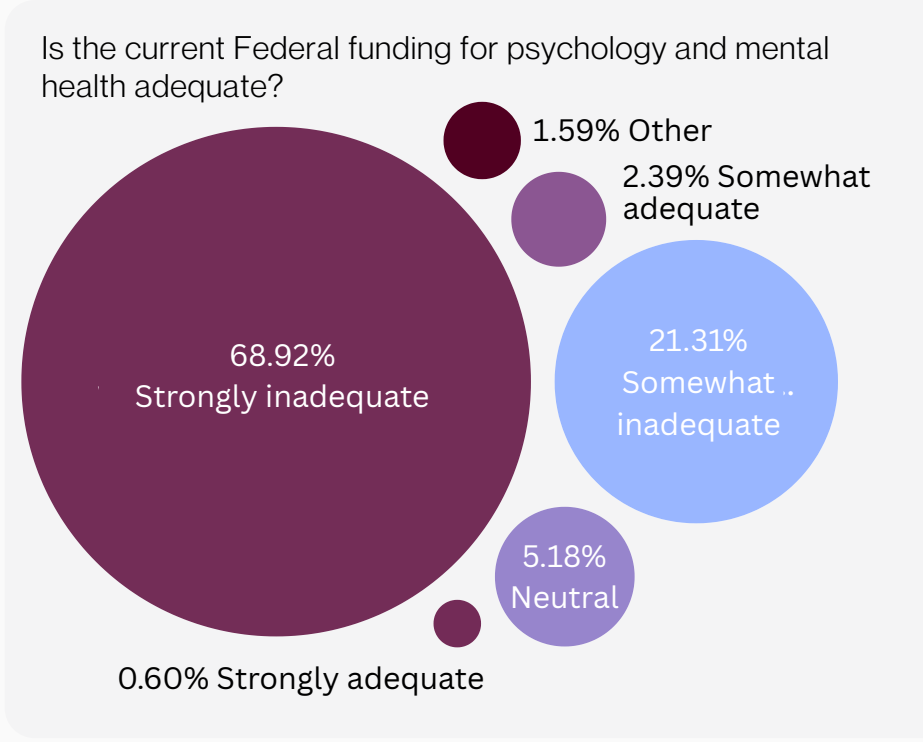
96% of psychologists in private practice noted that they had to turn away clients or delay care due to financial barriers.



98% of psychologists in private practice need to turn away or delay the care of clients due to Better Access session limits.



Over 65% of psychologists support bulk billing incentives to improve affordability further.



“People without money do not even dream of psychological help, so they don't even ask.”

Solution

03

Increase the Medicare rebate for psychological services to \$150 per session.

Increasing the rebate will encourage more bulk billing, which will improve access for low-income patients. It will also improve access to services, particularly with the cost of living, and protect the viability of the workforce.

77% of respondents consider increasing the Medicare rebate to \$150 as the most important.



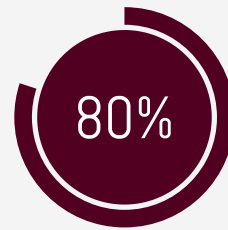
Key challenge 2: Insufficient Sessions under Better Access

Members expressed concern that the current 10-session cap is inadequate, especially for clients with complex or chronic conditions.

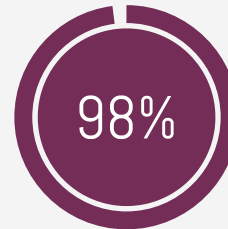
A minimum of 20 sessions per year was widely endorsed, with some calling for flexible or unlimited models based on clinical judgment.

More sessions would reduce reliance on crisis care and enable sustained therapeutic outcomes.

“We are treating complex trauma in 10 Medicare sessions per year – it’s laughable.”



of psychologists cite the limited number of Medicare sessions as the number one barrier for patients to access services.



of psychologists in private practice need to turn away or delay the care of clients due to Better Access session limits.

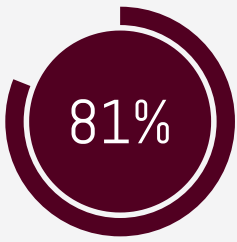
Solution

Restore Better Access to 20 sessions per year.

Restoring Better Access to 20 sessions per year will help people with complex needs to receive proper, ongoing psychological care.



Key challenge 3: Reform the two-tier Medicare system



81% of psychologists say ending the two-tier system is the issue that is most important to them.

Clinical psychologists make up only 30% of the psychology workforce but qualify for a rebate that is nearly 40% higher than registered psychologists and psychologists with other areas of practice endorsement. This is despite proven equal outcomes from generally registered psychologists.

This higher-tier rebate forces many Australians to choose from a fraction of available psychologists simply because it's the more affordable option. A cross-system review of rebate and recognition structures across Medicare, NDIS, DVA and public settings is urgently needed to end the financial disadvantage for patients.

Forcing registered psychologists to operate on a lower rebate impacts the affordability of 70% of mental health care services, leaving a huge gap for the most vulnerable Australians in this time of great need.

Rural and regional Australians are disproportionately impacted, exacerbating geographical inequities.

Some noted that even where services are available, clients cannot find psychologists with the right skill set, including neurodiversity-affirming, trauma-informed, or culturally safe practitioners.

"Please just end this demoralising and absurd two-tier system."

"Abolish two-tier psych discrimination... Everyone should be able to access weekly psych if needed."

"It's divisive, elitist, and based on outdated structures that do not reflect actual competence."

Solution

03

Abolish the discriminatory two-tier rebate system, establishing a single, unified rebate.

This will enhance consumer choice and availability, and reduce confusion and inequity.

A rebate review is urgently needed across private practice, public care, DVA and the NDIS, to ensure that psychologists are appropriately utilised.



Key challenge 4: Supporting the future workforce

There is a rising demand for mental health support without the corresponding workforce growth to support it.

Respondents expressed deep concern about the sustainability, equity, and accessibility of the psychology profession. Many expressed widespread concern about the cost of training and supervision for provisionally registered and early-career psychologists who incur supervision fees, unpaid placements, and low income during training years.

Respondents warned that poor pay, burnout, and lack of support are pushing psychologists to abandon the profession and leaving new graduates 'burnt out and broke,' causing major concern for the future of the workforce.

*"Psychology has become
unsustainable as a profession"*

Solution

All parties and candidates must consider the future psychology workforce in their policies.

Allow provisional psychologists to deliver Medicare-rebated services under supervision, increasing immediate service availability.

Support the future psychology workforce by funding paid placements and expanding training pathways.

Final recommendations

04

Respondents made it clear that psychology is at a critical juncture, expressing a deep concern about the current state of psychology in Australia. The biggest challenges identified include the two-tier system, financial instability, burnout, scope creep, and training bottlenecks.

While there is a strong desire for hope and action, many fear that without urgent reform, the profession will lose skilled practitioners and become increasingly inaccessible to those in need.

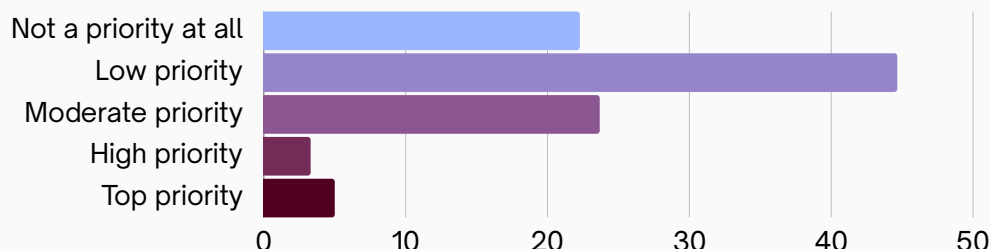
AAPi calls on all political parties and candidates in the upcoming federal election to urgently commit to the following priorities:

- Increase the Medicare rebate for psychology services to \$150 per session, ensuring equitable access for all Australians.
- Restore and expand the Better Access initiative to at least 20 sessions per year, enabling continuous and effective care for complex mental health conditions.
- Immediately abolish the discriminatory two-tier Medicare rebate system to provide fair and equitable access to psychological services regardless of psychologist endorsement status.
- Invest in the sustainability of the psychology workforce through expanded paid placements, more accessible postgraduate training pathways, and allowing provisional psychologists to provide Medicare-rebated services.

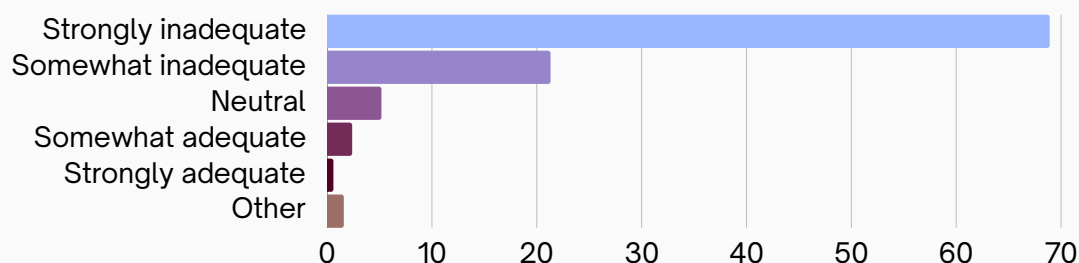


Full research findings

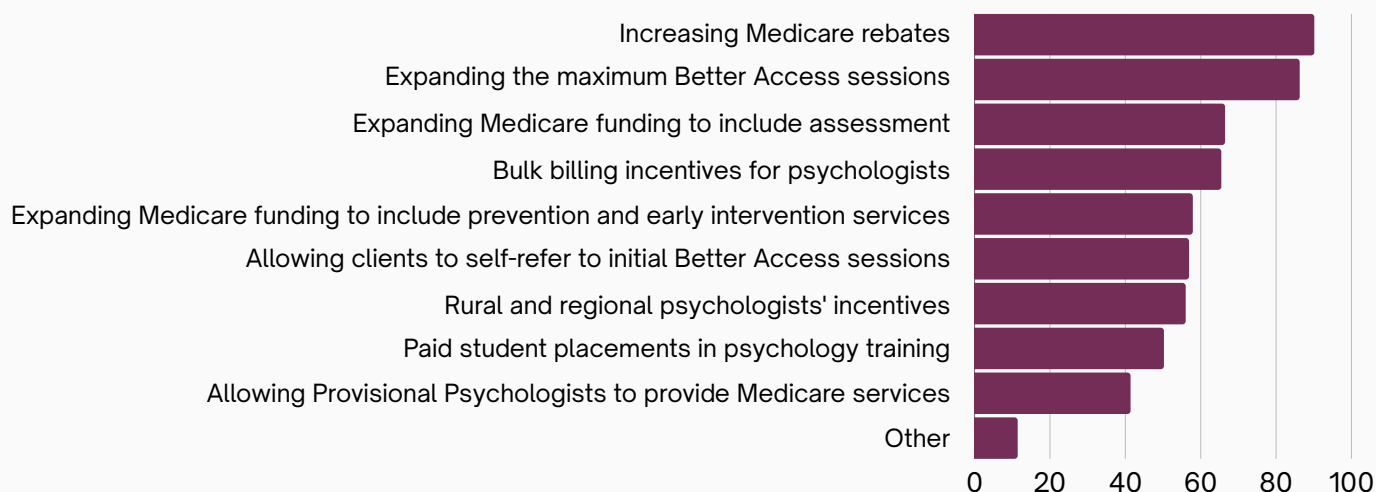
Q1. Do you think psychology and mental health are priorities for the current federal government?



Q2. Is the current Federal funding for psychology and mental health adequate?

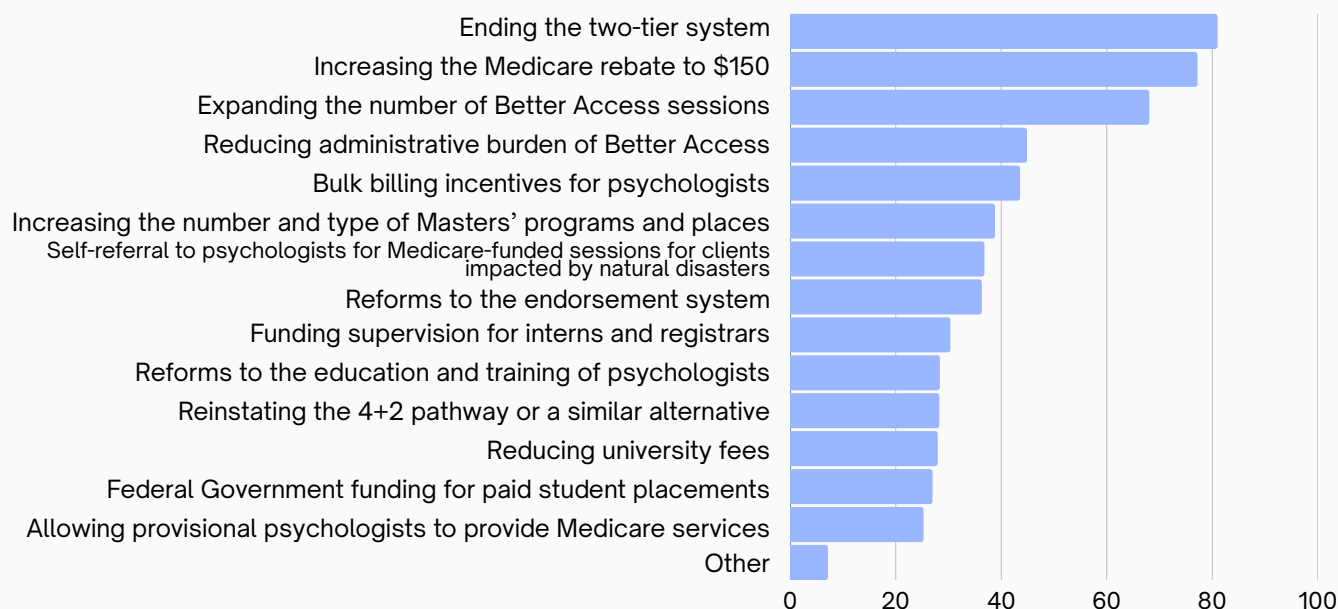


Q3. What mental health and psychology initiatives should the Federal Government fund? Please select all that apply.



Full research findings

Q4. Which of the following AAPi advocacy initiatives are most important to you? Please select all that apply.



Q5. What are the top challenges/concerns you would like addressed through AAPi's advocacy in the upcoming Federal Election?

1. Abolishing the Two-Tier System

The most frequently cited concern was the two-tier system. Members described this system as:

- Discriminatory and divisive, undermining the skills and experience of generally registered psychologists.
- Financially detrimental to both practitioners and clients, due to lower rebates for services by non-endorsed psychologists.
- Damaging to professional unity, creating confusion among clients and stakeholders, and reducing access to care.

Many called for a single rebate for all psychologists, recognising general registration as equivalent in terms of therapeutic efficacy and professional competence.

2. Increasing Medicare Rebates and Bulk Billing Incentives

Members consistently advocated for a substantial increase in the Medicare rebate, with many recommending a minimum of \$150 per session. This increase is seen as necessary to:

- Ensure financial viability of private practice.
- Encourage more bulk billing, improving access for low-income clients.
- Offset the growing cost of living and business expenses.

Full research findings

05

Q5. What are the top challenges/concerns you would like addressed through AAPI's advocacy in the upcoming Federal Election? (continued)

3. Expanding the Number of Rebated Sessions under Better Access

There was a strong consensus that the current 10 Medicare-funded sessions per year are grossly inadequate, particularly for clients with complex, chronic, or high-risk presentations. Respondents called for:

- A return to 20 sessions per year.
- Unlimited or flexible session allocations, based on clinical need and GP/psychologist recommendations.
- Less administrative burden on both GPs and psychologists in managing referrals and re-referrals.

4. Workforce and Training Pathways

Workforce concerns featured prominently, with repeated calls to:

- Expand postgraduate training places, especially for Masters programmes beyond the clinical endorsement track.
- Reinstate or improve alternative pathways to registration (e.g. 4+2 or 5+1 pathways).
- Offer paid placements and internships, particularly to support provisional psychologists and increase rural access.
- Allow provisional psychologists to provide Medicare-rebated services under supervision, to expand access and job opportunities.

5. Issues with Ahpra

Respondents expressed frustration with Ahpra's slow, opaque, and punitive processes, particularly in investigations.

6. NDIS and Scope Creep by Other Professions

There were widespread concerns about the erosion of psychologists' scope of practice, especially under the NDIS:

- Other professions (e.g. OTs, counsellors, coaches) providing services traditionally offered by psychologists.
- Lack of recognition of psychologists' role in assessments and diagnosis, particularly under the NDIS.
- Reports of misuse and rorting of NDIS funds by other professions.

7. Broader Mental Health System Failings

Other critical concerns included:

- Underfunding of public mental health services, especially in rural and regional areas.
- Lack of continuity and integration between systems like DVA, NDIS, and Medicare.
- Need for better preventative and early intervention strategies, particularly for vulnerable populations such as children, aged care residents, and people experiencing domestic violence or trauma.

Full research findings

05

Q8. If AAPi could only focus on ONE advocacy campaign in this Federal election, which would you choose?

1. End the Two-Tier Medicare Rebate System

By far the most commonly cited response, members overwhelmingly nominated the abolition of the two-tier rebate system as the singular issue for AAPi to champion. Responses conveyed:

- Deep frustration at the discrimination between generally registered and endorsed (especially clinical) psychologists.
- Belief that the current system lacks clinical justification and perpetuates a false hierarchy.
- Concern that it reduces access, affordability, and fairness for clients.
- Strong support for a single rebate for all psychologists, based on competence and experience rather than endorsement status.

Many members described the two-tier system as the root of multiple other issues, including inequity, professional identity confusion, and workforce division.

2. Increase the Medicare Rebate to \$150 for All Psychologists

A significant proportion of members emphasised the need for a higher and equal Medicare rebate (frequently nominating \$150 per session). This was viewed as critical for:

- Sustaining private practice, particularly amid rising operating costs.
- Allowing more practitioners to bulk bill or reduce gap fees.
- Improving access and affordability for clients across Australia, especially in low-income and rural areas.

Some respondents linked the rebate increase to the two-tier issue, arguing that setting a fair, unified rate would simultaneously eliminate the tiered structure.

3. Expand the Number of Better Access Sessions

The third most common priority was increasing the number of Medicare-rebated sessions available under Better Access. Members expressed concern that:

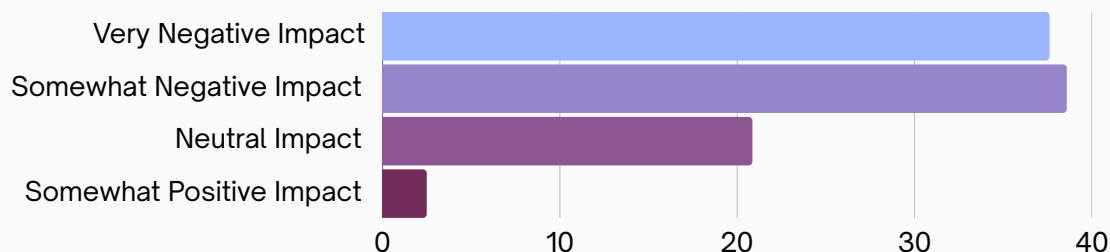
- The current 10-session cap is inadequate, especially for clients with complex or chronic conditions.
- A minimum of 20 sessions per year was widely endorsed, with some calling for flexible or unlimited models based on clinical judgement.
- More sessions would reduce reliance on crisis care and enable sustained therapeutic outcomes.

The dominant advocacy priority - ending the two-tier Medicare rebate system - was repeated hundreds of times, often expressed with urgency, frustration, and clarity. This was closely followed by calls to raise the rebate amount to \$150, and to increase the number of Better Access sessions to 20 or more. The message from AAPi members is resounding: they seek a fair, unified, and accessible mental health system, with psychologists recognised and supported equally across the profession.

Full research findings

05

Q9. How do you think the reforms to the NDIS have impacted current/future participants?



Q10. Is there anything further you would like to share about the impact of the NDIS reforms?

The responses reveal a deep and widespread concern among psychologists regarding the negative impact of recent NDIS reforms on participants, practitioners, and the broader mental health sector. The survey responses paint a clear picture of a system under strain, where recent reforms have caused confusion, reduced access, and declining trust. Psychologists are calling for urgent reform to reinstate psychology as a core, respected, and appropriately funded discipline within the NDIS, to ensure that participants receive the care they need and deserve.

1. Reduced Access to Psychology Services

Many members reported that psychological services have been removed or restricted in participant plans, leaving clients without the support they urgently need.

2. Devaluation of Psychologists and Scope Creep

Members are increasingly concerned about psychologists being replaced by less qualified practitioners, including OTs, counsellors, or behaviour support workers.

3. Confusion, Inconsistency, and Lack of Transparency

Many respondents described a system that is chaotic and inconsistent, with inadequately trained staff making life-altering decisions.

4. Increased Administrative Burden on Psychologists

Psychologists report spending unpaid hours navigating paperwork, producing reports, and advocating for clients—often with little or no success.

5. Undermining of Client Wellbeing and Safety

Numerous members shared accounts of clients deteriorating, self-harming, or becoming suicidal after losing access to their psychologist.

6. Systemic Misunderstanding of Disability and Mental Health

There is a fundamental failure to recognise the link between psychosocial disability and mental health, especially in neurodivergent clients.

Full research findings

Q10. Is there anything further you would like to share about the impact of the NDIS reforms? (continued)

7. Wasted Resources and Inadequate Oversight

Many members expressed anger over fraud, exploitation, and poor-quality service provision being left unchecked, while legitimate providers are defunded.

8. Calls to Action and Suggested Solutions

AAPi members want to see:

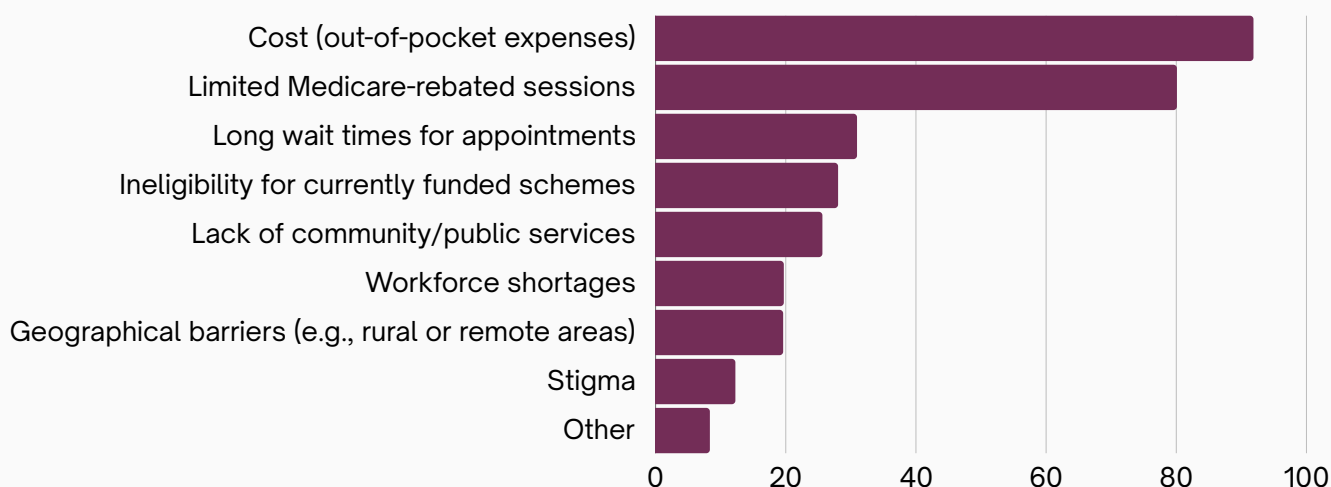
- Psychologists explicitly recognised and funded as core NDIS providers.
- NDIS staff properly trained to understand the role and scope of psychologists.
- A system that is fair, evidence-based, and client-centred.

Conclusion

The responses clearly demonstrate a crisis in confidence in the NDIS following recent reforms. Psychologists are seeing clients suffer, feel abandoned, and deteriorate under a system that is increasingly seen as bureaucratic, inconsistent, and lacking insight into the realities of psychosocial disability. There is strong support for AAPi to advocate for:

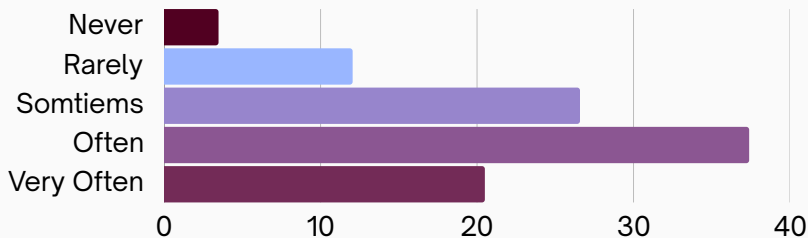
- Restoring and protecting psychology funding,
- Recognising the unique role of psychologists, and
- Ensuring all Australians with disability have access to the mental health support they need.

Q11. What are the biggest barriers your clients face in accessing psychology services? Please select all that apply.

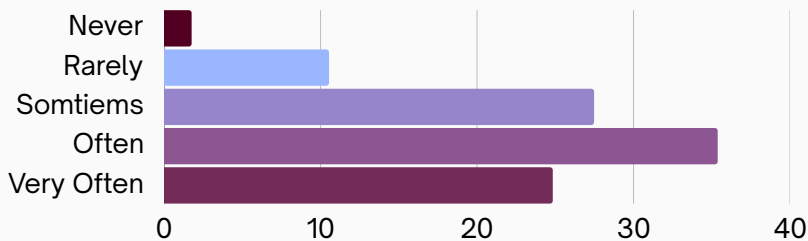


Full research findings

Q12. If you work in private practice, how often do you have to turn away or delay seeing clients due to financial barriers?

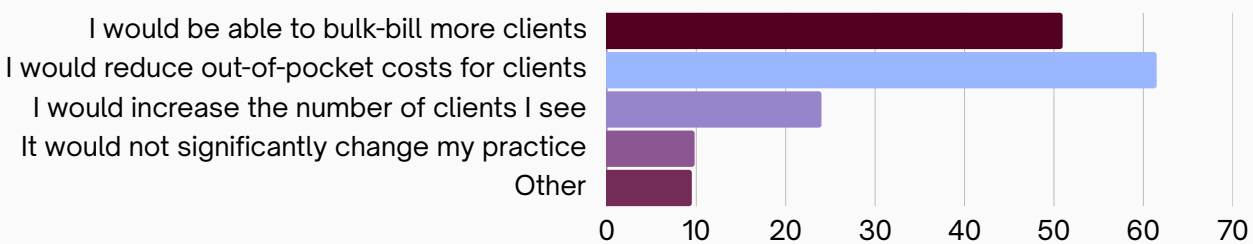


Q13. If you work in private practice, how often do you have to turn away or delay seeing clients due to Better Access session limits?



Q14. If you work in private practice, what impact would an increase in the Medicare rebate for all psychologists to \$150 have?

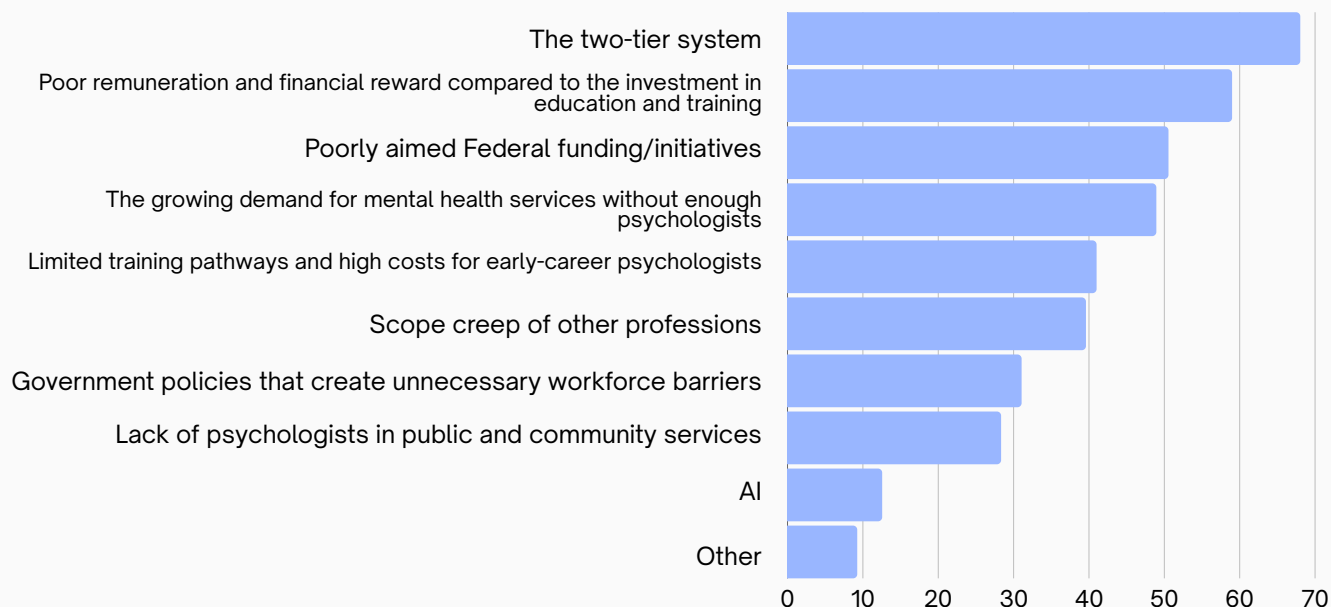
Please select all that apply.



Full research findings

Q15. What do you believe is the biggest challenge facing psychologists over the next three to five years?

Please select all that apply.



Q16. What do you see as the key advocacy areas that will assist the next generation of psychologists?

Respondents expressed deep concern about the sustainability, equity, and accessibility of the psychology profession. Many offered detailed suggestions for how to improve the pathway for future psychologists, highlighting themes around training, workforce support, professional unity, and systemic reform.

Ending the Two-Tier Medicare System

The most frequently cited issue was the abolition of the two-tier system, with respondents overwhelmingly stating that this division is unfair, harmful to morale, and a major barrier to professional unity and sustainability.

Reforming Education and Training Pathways

Respondents called for significant changes to the structure and cost of psychology education, including reinstating the 4+2 pathway, expanding Masters places, and introducing more flexible, affordable models.

Many highlighted the competitive bottleneck at postgraduate level and called for greater transparency and equity in admissions.

Full research findings

Q16. What do you see as the key advocacy areas that will assist the next generation of psychologists? (continued)

Financial Support for Students and Early Career Psychologists

There is widespread concern about the cost of training and supervision, especially for provisionally registered and early-career psychologists. This includes fees, unpaid placements, and low income during training years.

Workforce Sustainability and Better Pay

Respondents warned that poor pay, burnout, and lack of support are pushing psychologists to leave the profession. They called for better Medicare rebates, especially for non-clinical psychologists, and more recognition of generalist roles.

Supporting a Diverse and Inclusive Profession

Many stressed the importance of improving equity and access to the profession, especially for people from lower socioeconomic backgrounds, culturally diverse communities, and rural areas.

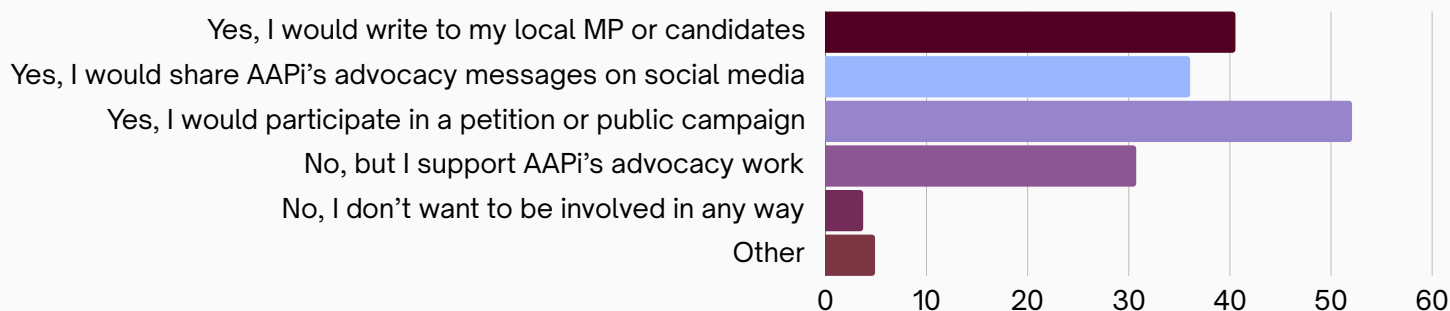
Preventing Scope Creep and Promoting Professional Identity

Respondents expressed concern about other professions (e.g. OTs, social workers) encroaching on psychology's scope, often with less training and regulation. They urged stronger advocacy to protect the distinct role of psychologists.

Public Awareness and Promotion of Psychology

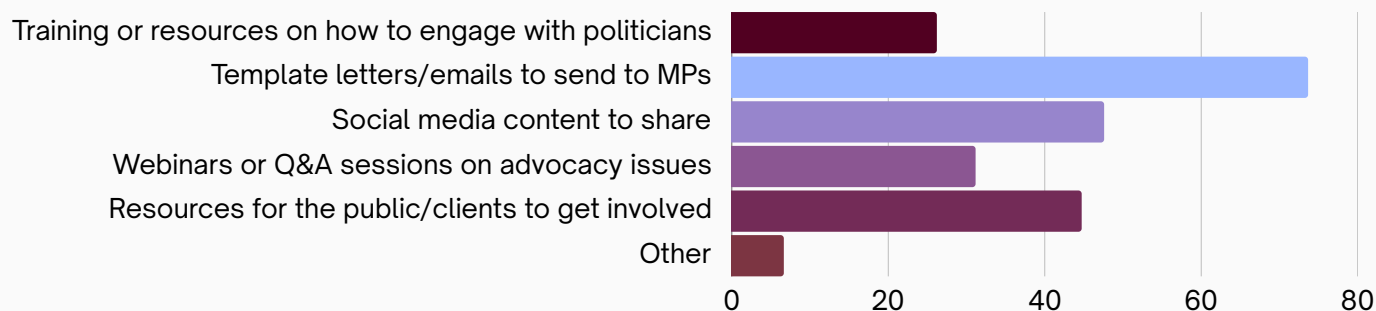
Several responses emphasised the need for broader public education and promotion of the psychology profession to ensure public recognition, funding, and appropriate referrals.

Q17. Would you be willing to participate in AAPi advocacy efforts during the Federal election? Please select all that apply.



Full research findings

Q18. What additional support would help you engage in AAPi's advocacy efforts? Please select all that apply.



Q19. Is there anything else you would like to say about advocacy and the Federal election?

Respondents expressed strong appreciation for AAPi's advocacy work and a deep concern about the current state of psychology in Australia. The dominant message was one of support and encouragement, paired with frustration over systemic issues that affect the profession and access to care.

Many members highlighted the need for a more prominent voice for psychology in public and political discussions. One respondent urged, "Build the profile of psychology for the public – we need to be higher profile."

The two-tier Medicare rebate system remained a recurring source of frustration. Comments included: "Please just end this demoralising and absurd two-tier system," and "Abolish two-tier psych discrimination... Everyone should be able to access weekly psych if needed."

Many noted that the current funding models and public systems are failing clients and providers alike. One wrote, "I have closed my private practice because clients can't afford sessions once the 10 Medicare sessions run out." Another commented, "Clients are being passed from one short-term service to another. They don't get the long-term support they need."

There was strong support for AAPi's continued efforts. Many expressed gratitude: "Thank you for being our voice," "You give me hope for our profession," and "AAPi is a force to be reckoned with." One psychologist wrote, "I was with APS before the two-tier system. I left with a broken heart. AAPi makes me feel safe again."

Several respondents made practical suggestions, such as creating an election scorecard comparing party policies, campaigning in specific electorates, or using popular media more effectively. "Please advertise on TV and social media to educate the public," one said, while another added, "A unified voice will have more impact – bring allied health and the public with us."

Finally, there was a strong desire for hope and action. "Don't stop," one respondent urged. "You are doing amazing work." Another concluded, "Keep going. I'm almost retired now, but the next generation needs a better system."



About Australian Association of Psychologists Inc (AAPI):

The AAPI is a not-for-profit peak body for psychologists that aims to preserve the rich diversity of psychological practice in Australia.

www.aapi.org.au
admin@aapi.org.au
0488 770 044