

MEDIA RELEASE

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Peak psychology body says paid placement scheme essential for allied health

The peak body for all psychologists fully supports the proposed paid placement scheme for all allied health students, put forward by MPs David Pocock and Dr Monique Ryan in Parliament today.

The Australian Association of Psychologists (AAPi) Executive Director, Tegan Carrison, said unpaid placements put psychology students at a disadvantage.

“Psychology students can do up to 1000 hours unpaid labour for their placements, which pushes them into placement poverty and impacts their mental health and wellbeing,” Ms Carrison said.

“It is also a deterrent for those who come from underprivileged backgrounds to be able to participate in higher education,” she said.

“Psychologists are only meeting 35% of the Federal Government’s psychology workforce goal, and exclusion from the paid placement scheme will entrench this shortage.

“There is a desperate need to grow the workforce to service the unabating mental health crisis in our country.

“As healthcare professionals in training, psychologists must be given equal consideration.”

CASE STUDY 1

Melissa Land, Tarrawingee, North Eastern Victoria

Motivated by the need for more psychological services in her rural community after successive natural disasters (drought, flood and fire), Melissa Land, 49, returned to university to complete her psychology degree in 2022, after a 20-year break.

She is now in her final year of a Masters of Clinical Psychology at Federation University, based out of a Ballarat campus.

“The pathway to completing my studies has been arduous,” she said.

Due to her time away from study, it began with a bridging course, which took 18 months and cost \$50,000. Melissa completed this online and was able to defer her fees through FEE HELP. She then completed her Honours at Federation Uni and was granted a Commonwealth Supported Place, which meant she had enough FEE-HELP remaining to be able to complete her Masters as well.

“Although online study eased the pressure of travel and time away from home, it also meant that I was not able to work more than one day per week,” she explained.

Doing the Masters degree has been especially difficult for Melissa, because of the requirement to study face-to-face and complete unpaid placements of 1000 hours.

Ballarat is a four-hour drive from Melissa's home - so she has had to live away from her family for the past 12 months.

"I spend the equivalent of a full day every week just driving to and from Ballarat and I have to pay \$100 per night for accommodation, for three nights each week.

"With the demands of study, placement days and travel, I have extremely limited earning capacity and no entitlement to financial support as my husband works full-time.

"I naively expected that there would be grants available to support people in my situation, however the amounts I have been able to access are minimal.

"Through Going Rural Health I was awarded an annual \$500 payment to support accommodation costs, and through Rural Workforce Agency Victoria I was awarded an annual \$700 payment to support travel.

"These grants are insignificant when I am paying \$300 each week for accommodation costs for my required 42 weeks of placement, and spending around \$100 a week in petrol for the round trip of 620km a week.

"The financial and emotional strain on my family is enormous. I have foregone paid employment for 3.5 years to get to this point and acquired a hefty student debt.

"There have been many times when I have contemplated simply stepping away, but in just 12 months, I will be fully registered. I am determined to find a way to make it work, and I will.

"I am just so disappointed that psychology has been overlooked in the paid placement scheme. It makes no sense when there is a shortage of psychologists in regional communities. Surely, we want more people like me, from regional communities, to become qualified psychologists and fill the gap in services."

CASE STUDY 2

Elizabeth Alfonso, Canberra

Elizabeth is a 23 year old student in the final year of her Masters of Professional Psychology degree at ANU, Canberra.

She has to complete 300 hours of unpaid placement this year. Between this and her studies she only has one day a week free, which restricts her ability to do casual work.

"Receiving paid placements would have made an incredible difference to my life as a student - I would have been able to save money towards moving out of home, felt more independent and it would have taken away the burden on my parents," she said.

CASE STUDY 3

Diana Kazakov, Sydney

Diana is a Masters of Clinical Psychology student at the University of Technology, Sydney who is about to embark on 1000 hours of unpaid placement which she will complete over the next 18 months, in addition to coursework and a Masters thesis.

“For the first half of this year, I have been doing 70 hour weeks of study and work combined. It has been a bit of a frenzy each week trying to balance work, assignments, preparing for the next week of classes, housework, time for family, time for my partner, and trying (but often failing) to have some semblance of a social life.

“For the next six months, things will ramp up and I will be required on campus five days per week for classes and my first placement. I will also begin working on my Masters thesis on top of that. I am extremely lucky to now be in a position where I am able to reduce my work hours due to my partner now being able to shoulder a bigger chunk of our living expenses.

“Having access to paid placements would be absolutely life changing for many of my peers, particularly those in far more difficult situations than mine.

“Access to Commonwealth-supported placements would help us work towards creating a workforce of psychologists in Australia with a more diverse range of backgrounds and life experiences to be as helpful as possible to a wider range of clients.”

About the Australian Association of Psychologists Inc (AAPi)

The AAPi is a not-for-profit peak body for all psychologists that aims to preserve the rich diversity of psychological practice in Australia. Formed in 2010 by a group of passionate grassroots psychologists, the AAPi's primary goal is to address inequality in the profession and represent all psychologists and their clients equally to government and funding bodies. Its primary mission is to lobby for equitable access for the Australian public to professional psychological services such as Medicare Better Access Scheme and the National Disability Insurance Scheme.