

MEDIA RELEASE

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HECS debt for psychologists could be reduced with incentives

The peak body for all psychologists says HECS debt for psychology graduates could be significantly reduced by offering monetary incentives to psychologists located in rural and regional areas, which would also alleviate the workforce shortages in these locations.

Executive Director of the Australian Association of Psychologists, Tegan Carrison, said the burden of HECS debts particularly impacted psychology students, with the HELP loan limit sitting at \$121,844. Around 39% of psychology students have a debt of between \$80k and \$100k; and 26% have a debt of over \$100k.

"Psychology is a female-dominated profession with 80.5% women - which means when they graduate and perhaps have children a few years down the track, they have to work part-time and pay for childcare. Having the HECS debt hanging over their heads creates additional stress.

"We know that there is a massive workforce shortage of mental health professionals in rural and regional areas, but if the Federal Government could offer psychologists incentives in the same way GPs have been, it would be a win-win for the mental well-being of both the provider and the client."

Ms Carrison said the loan limit meant that some future psychologists could not complete their studies.

"Psychology students could easily go beyond the loan limit, particularly if they attend a higher paying private for-profit institution or a double degree or Doctorate," she said.

"Course fees vary significantly, with some psychology degrees falling outside of preferential government funding banding. This needs to be addressed urgently."

Ms Carrison said this was another reason the 4+2 program needed to be reintroduced - four years of accredited study followed by a two-year internship, after which students become eligible for general registration as psychologists.

About AAPi

AAPi is a not-for-profit peak body for psychologists that aims to preserve the rich diversity of psychological practice in Australia. Formed in 2010 by a group of passionate grassroots psychologists, 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.

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