

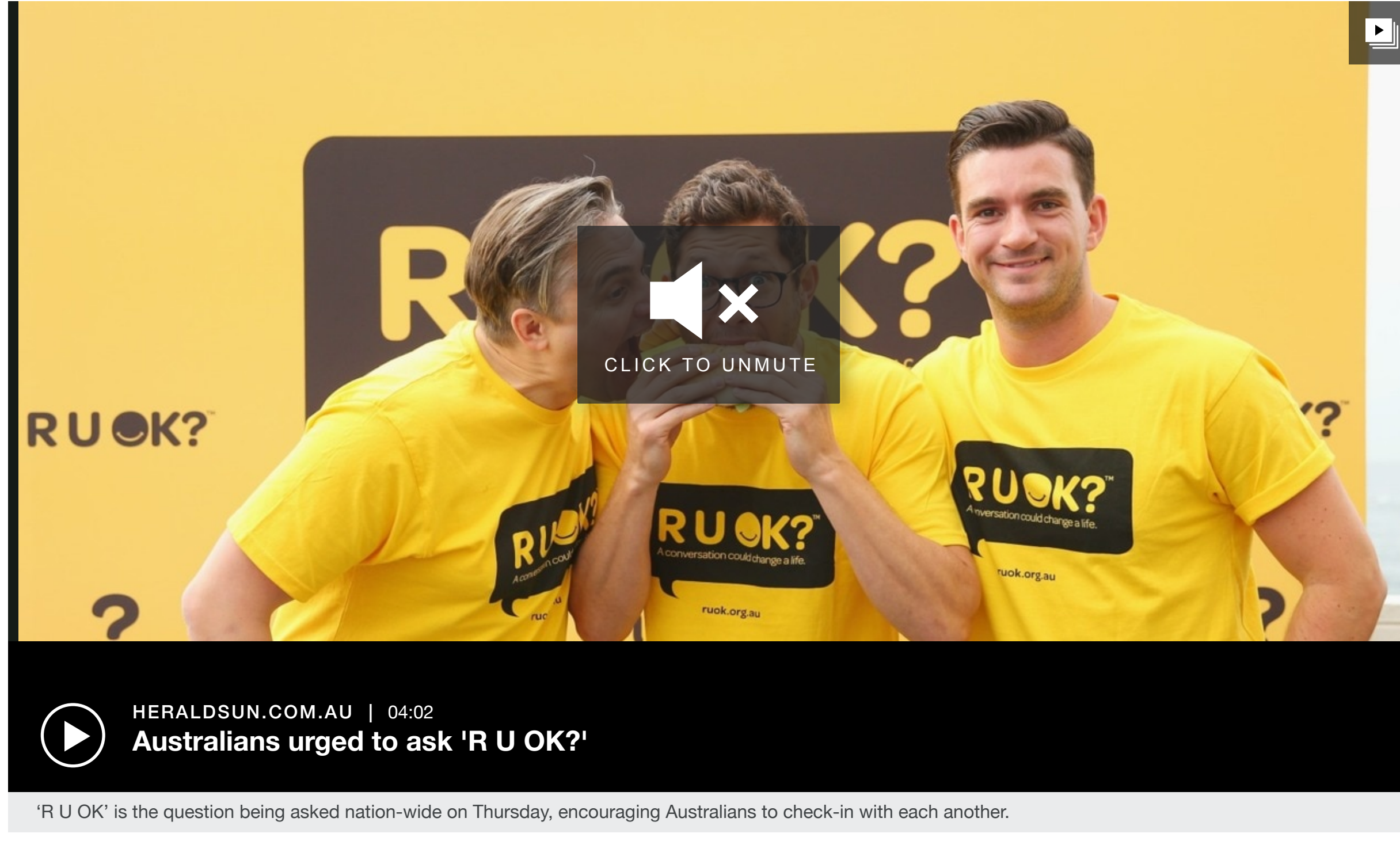
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## Call to give trainee psychologists access to Medicare rebates to help mental health crisis

A leading expert says this simple move would open up urgent access for so many Australians who are suffering from mental health issues.

Mitch Clarke  
2 min read July 26, 2022 - 1:00PM

Herald Sun



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More Victorians will fall through the cracks of the state's [mental health crisis](#) unless trainee psychologists are given urgent access to Medicare rebates, a leading industry group has warned.

Currently, more than 2100 student psychologists are available to offer supervised services in a move that would significantly cut huge waiting lists across Victoria.

Australian Association of Psychologists executive director Tegan Carrison this week wrote to the Andrews and Albanese governments, demanding they issue an immediate green light to Medicare rebates for provisional psychologists.

Provisional psychologists – or students who have completed at least four to five years of formal university education and are in the last stages of supervised practice before reaching full registration – can work with clients, and often, already work in private practice under the supervision of a qualified practitioner.



Some people are waiting longer than nine months to see a psychologist

However, there is currently no option for provisional psychologists to offer a Medicare rebate, meaning patients would need to pay for their appointment, potentially pushing treatment out of arm's reach.

A November 2021 survey of over 200 private practice psychologists found nearly half were unable to accept new clients.

"It is common for clients to have to wait longer than nine months to see a psychologist," Ms Carrison said.

"We really need to act. We are definitely concerned about people falling through the cracks."

There are 2164 student psychologists available in Victoria, and more than 7600 around the country. Dipping into this workforce and creating a Medicare rebate would open up access for "so many more Australians who are suffering", Ms Carrison said.

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"Our community is really struggling. Our system is struggling. We are in the grips of a mental health crisis," she added.

The call also comes just days after the dire state of Victoria's mental health crisis was exposed in a damning parliamentary report that found the Andrews government's Covid rules exacerbated the mental health crisis.

The Australian Association of Psychologists' proposal has been touted a similar prospect to the Andrews government plan to deploy 1000 student nurses across the public healthcare sector, announced on Sunday.

Ms Carrison said Victoria could fund a pilot program in state services, but said she has "absolutely no idea" why the pitch is being met with resistance.

"Other areas of healthcare are using their student workforce throughout this crisis, so why is mental health being treated differently," she said.

Opposition mental health spokeswoman Emma Kealy said the Victorian Liberal and Nationals back the sector's calls to unlock trainee psychologists to relieve worker shortages.

"Yet again the Andrews Labor government is deliberately ignoring immediate opportunities for mental health reforms that will save lives," she said.



Australian Association of Psychologists executive director Tegan Carrison.

"(This) means more resources cannot only be redirected for vulnerable people suffering debilitating poor mental health, but also into early interventions that will save Victorian lives."

A Victorian government spokeswoman said state funded services provide care to more acute patients who need higher levels of care.

"The Budget 2022/23 included a \$55 million investment to train more than 300 psychology registrars in public health settings," she said.

"This will significantly increase the availability of psychological interventions in public mental health settings."

The federal government was contacted for comment.

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