

2 March 2022

## **MEDIA RELEASE**

### **Medicare must support ongoing mental health of flood victims**

Australia's peak body for all psychologists says flood victims should be able to access vital mental health services under Medicare.

The **Australian Association of Psychologists (AAPi)** has been calling for the Medicare item numbers, introduced after the 2020 bushfire crisis, to be extended to include any large scale disaster, pandemic or traumatic event.

AAPi Executive Director, Tegan Carrison, said it was vital for people impacted by a disaster like the floods to be able to access quality psychological care quickly and easily.

"AAPi has been calling on the Federal Government for the past year to make these item numbers, once specifically created for bushfire victims, to be expanded to cover any form of disaster," she said.

"While disaster relief payments might help victims in the short term, the ongoing mental health impacts of a disaster can be devastating.

"We are calling on the government to be proactive in establishing trauma and disaster recovery item numbers so people can receive the support they need, when they need it.

"Research indicates that if early intervention and support is accessed, future negative impacts are reduced," she said.

Ms Carrison said AAPi was also calling for self-referral to psychologists to be made available.

This means patients are not required to have a diagnosed mental health condition, a GP mental health treatment plan, or a referral prior to requesting psychological services. They may also self-identify as being affected by flood and request a service.

Ms Carrison said this reduces barriers to access and reduces costs for everyone, because clients do not need to pay to see a GP which reduces Medicare spend.

"Mental health services received under these trauma and disaster recovery items should not count against a patient's quota of services under the Better Access to Psychiatrists, Psychologists and General Practitioners through the MBS (Better Access) initiative."

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**Tegan Carrison is the Executive Director of the Australian Association of Psychologists Inc (AAPi)**, a not-for-profit peak body representing all psychologists in Australia.

**About 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 funded under the current Medicare Better Access Scheme.