

# Medicare-subsidised mental health-specific services

Medicare-subsidised mental health-specific services are provided by [psychiatrists](#), [general practitioners \(GPs\)](#), [psychologists](#) and [other allied health professionals](#). The services described here are provided in a range of settings—for example, hospitals, consulting rooms, home visits and online videoconferencing—as defined in the Medicare Benefits Schedule (MBS). Information is presented on both patient and service provider characteristics and is limited to MBS-subsidised services only. These data relate only to mental health services that are claimed under specific mental health care MBS item numbers, which is a sub-component of GP mental health-related activity. Therefore, the reported number of patients who receive mental health related services is likely to be an underestimate of total mental health care activity. It is unclear how many additional people receive GP mental health-related care that is billed as a consultation against generic GP MBS item numbers. For further information on the MBS data, refer to the data source section on this website.

## Data downloads

[<xls link>Medicare-subsidised mental health-specific services](#)

[<pdf link>Medicare-subsidised mental health-specific services](#)

Data presented covers the time period 1984–85 to 2018–19. This section was last updated in January 2020.

## Key points

**2.7 million Australians** received Medicare-subsidised mental health-specific services in 2018–19.

**10.6%** of Australians received Medicare-subsidised mental health-specific services in 2018–19, an increase from **5.7%** in 2008–09.

**12.6%** of Australian females accessed Medicare-subsidised mental health-specific services compared to **8.5%** of Australian males in 2018–19.

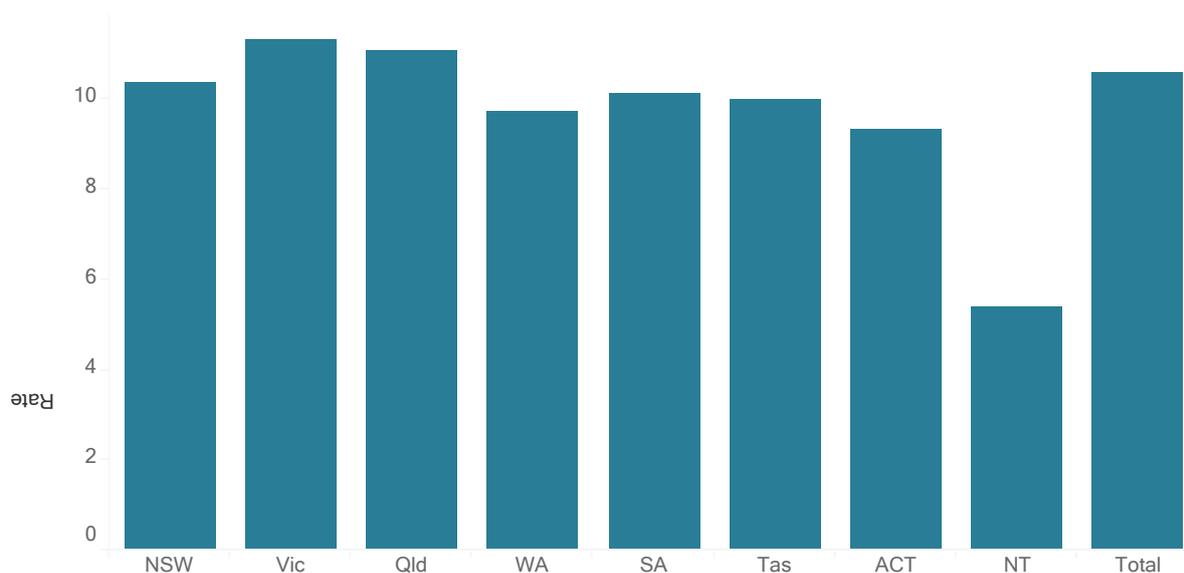
**12.1 million** Medicare-subsidised mental health-specific services were provided by psychiatrists, GPs, psychologists and other allied health professionals in 2018–19.

**Psychologists** (including clinical psychologists) provided the most Medicare-subsidised mental health-specific services during 2018–19.

## People receiving services

In 2018–19, 2.7 million Australians (10.6% of the population) received Medicare-subsidised mental health-specific services. Victoria had the highest proportion of the population receiving services (11.3% of the Victorian population) and the Northern Territory had the lowest (5.4% of the Northern Territory population) (Figure MBS.1).

Figure MBS.1. Proportion of population receiving Medicare-subsidised mental health-specific services, by states and territories, 2018-19

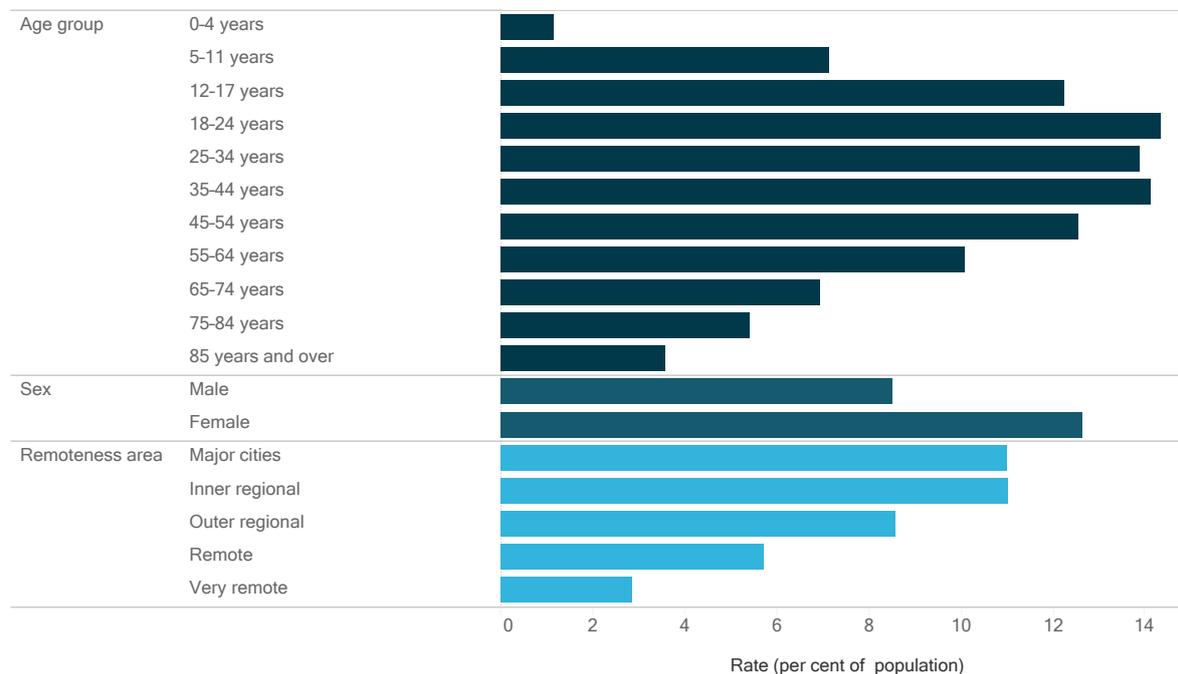


Source: Medicare Benefits Schedule data; Table MBS.1.

[www.aihw.gov.au/mhsa](http://www.aihw.gov.au/mhsa)

The highest proportion of people receiving Medicare-subsidised mental health-specific services were aged 18–24 years (14.4% of Australians in this age group), followed by 35–44 years (14.1%) and 25–34 years (13.9%), while the lowest proportion of people were aged 0–4 years (1.1%) (Figure MBS.2). A higher proportion of females (12.6% of the female population) accessed services compared with males (8.5%). The proportion of the Australian population receiving services varied according to the remoteness area of patient's residence. The proportion of people receiving services was the same for *Major cities* and *Inner regional* areas (11.0%), whilst the proportion of patients receiving services decreased with increasing remoteness to 2.9% of people living in *Very remote* areas.

Figure MBS.2. Proportion of population receiving Medicare-subsidised mental health-specific services, by demographic group, 2018-19



Source: Medicare Benefits Schedule data; Table MBS.2.

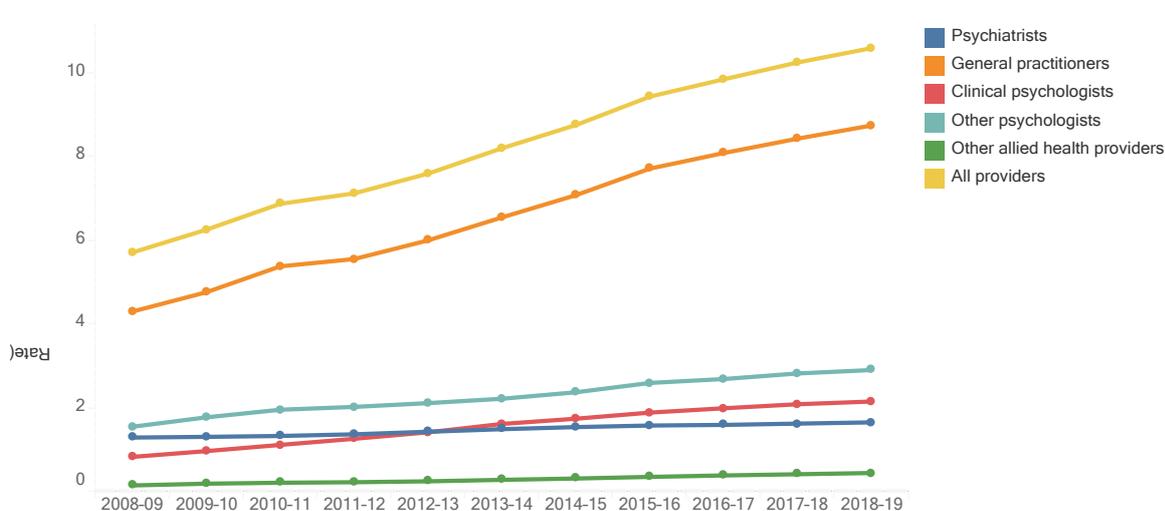
www.aihw.gov.au/mhsa

In 2018–19, 8.7% of the Australian population received Medicare-subsidised mental health-specific services from a general practitioner (GP); 1.6% received services from a psychiatrist; 2.1% received Psychological Therapy Services from a clinical psychologist; 2.9% received psychology services other than Psychological Therapy Services, from a psychologist (clinical psychologist or other psychologist); and 0.4% received services from other allied health professionals, noting that an individual may receive services from more than one provider type. The number of people reported here as receiving services from GPs is limited to services billed against mental health-specific MBS item numbers, which is a sub-component of GP mental health-related activity. It is unclear how many additional people receive GP mental health-related care that is billed as a consultation against generic GP MBS item numbers; however, the results of the 2015–16 the Bettering the Evaluation and Care of Health (BEACH) survey suggest that this number is likely to be substantial. The BEACH survey estimated that, in 2015–16, 12.4% (18 million encounters or 749.9 encounters per 1,000 population) of all GP encounters were mental-health related. In the same year about 3.2 million (or 135.5 services per 1,000 population) Medicare-subsidised mental health-specific services were provided. Further information can be found in the [General practice](#) section.

## Over time

The number of people receiving Medicare-subsidised mental health-specific services increased from 1.2 million (5.7% of Australians) in 2008–09 to 2.7 million (10.6% of Australians) in 2018–19. The percentage of Australians receiving services from psychiatrists was 1.3% in 2008–09 increasing to 1.6% in 2018–19, GPs 4.3% to 8.7%, clinical psychologists involving Psychological Therapy Services 0.8% to 2.1%, clinical psychologists (not involving Psychological Therapy Services), and other psychologists 1.5% to 2.9%, and other allied health services 0.1% to 0.4% (Figure MBS.3).

Figure MBS.3. Proportion of Australian population receiving Medicare-subsidised mental health-specific services, by provider type, 2008-09 to 2018-19



Source: Medicare Benefits Schedule data; Table MBS.4.

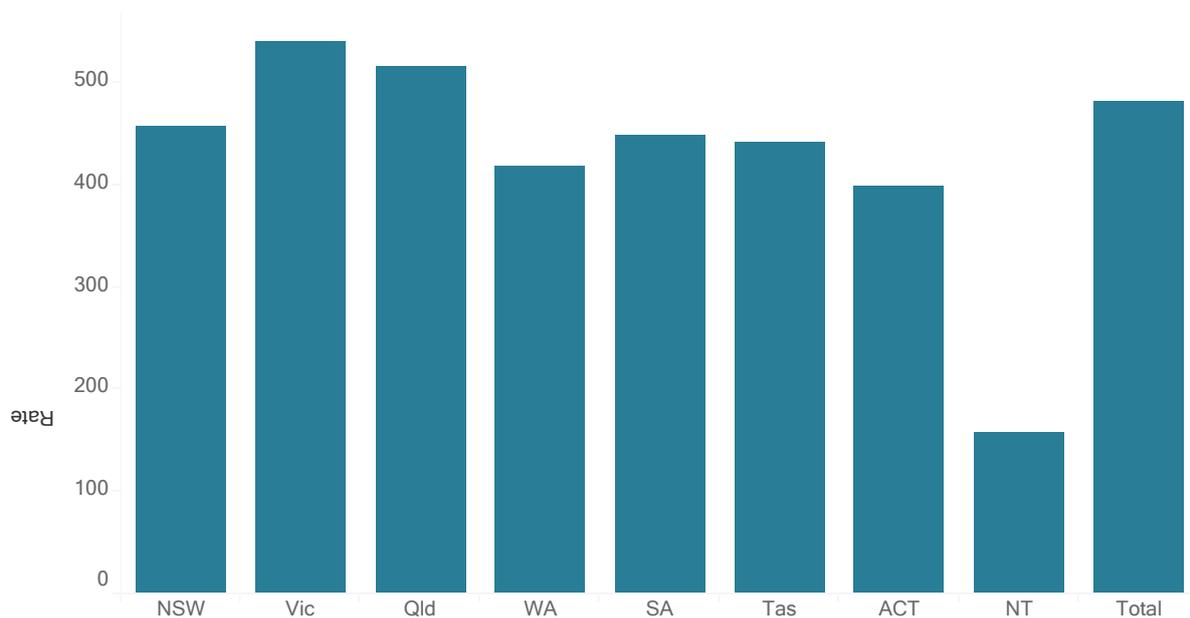
[www.aihw.gov.au/mhsa](http://www.aihw.gov.au/mhsa)

## Mental health-specific services

### Services

There were 12.1 million Medicare-subsidised mental health-specific services provided to 2.7 million Australians in 2018–19. Further details of the characteristics of these services are described below. Victoria (539.7 services per 1,000 state specific population) had the highest rate of services, and Northern Territory (156.4) had the lowest, considerably lower than the national rate (480.8) (Figure MBS.4).

Figure MBS.4. Rate (per 1,000 population) of Medicare-subsidised mental health-specific services, by state and territory, 2018-19

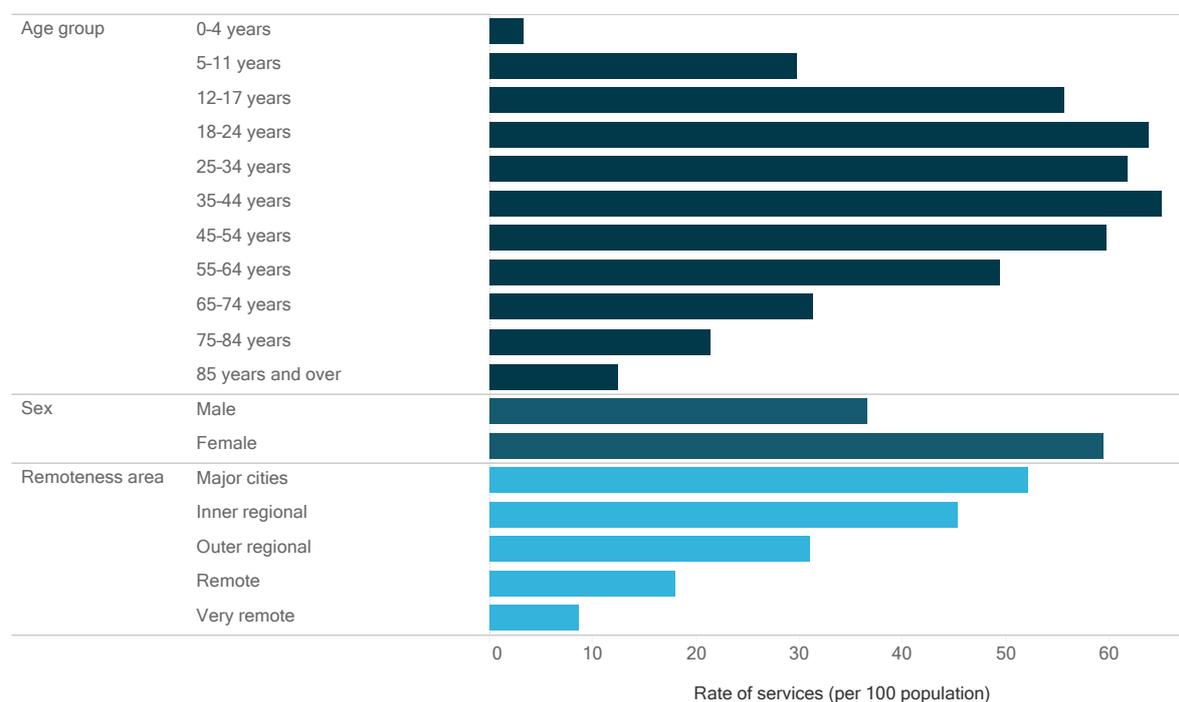


Source: Medicare Benefits Schedule data; Table MBS.8.

[www.aihw.gov.au/mhsa](http://www.aihw.gov.au/mhsa)

In 2018-19, Australians aged 35-44 years had the highest rate of Medicare-subsidised mental health-specific service use (65.1 services per 100 age specific population); people aged 0-4 years (3.2) had the lowest usage rate. Females had a higher rate of service usage than males (59.3 and 36.6 services per 100 sex specific population, respectively). People living in *Major Cities* had the highest rate of service use (52.1 per 100 remoteness area population), with rates decreasing by remoteness to 8.6 for *Very remote* (Figure MBS.5).

Figure MBS.5. Rate (per 100 population) of Medicare-subsidised mental health-specific services accessed by patients, by patient demographics, 2018-19



Source: Medicare Benefits Schedule data; Table MBS.10.

[www.aihw.gov.au/mhsa](http://www.aihw.gov.au/mhsa)

## Average number of services per patient

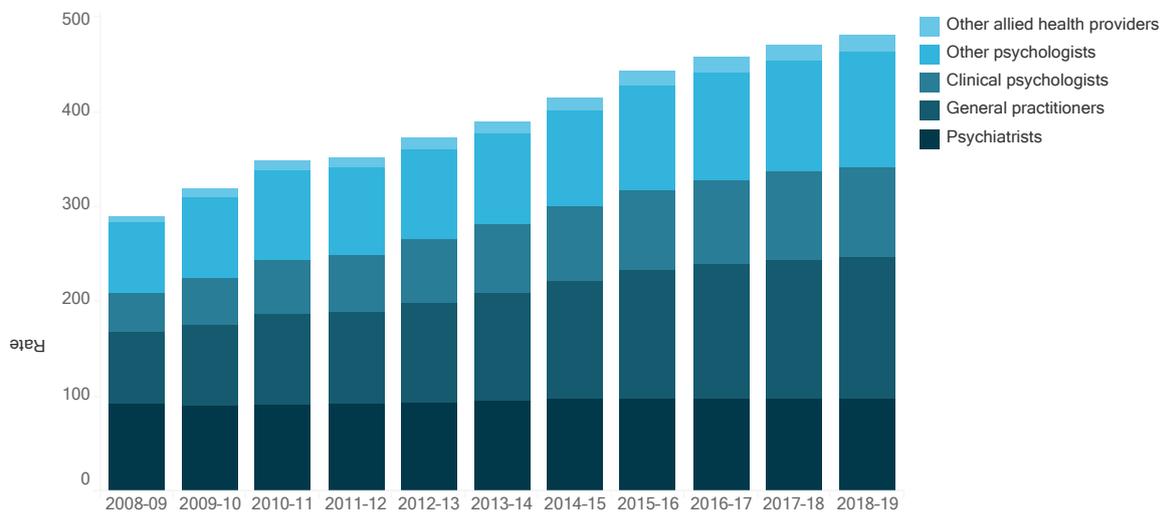
In 2018–19, patients in the Northern Territory had the lowest average number of Medicare-subsidised mental health-specific services per patient (2.9), compared with the national average of 4.5 services per patient. All other states and territories averaged between 4.3 and 4.8 services per patient. People aged 55–64 years had the highest average number of services per patient (4.9) among the age groups and patients aged 0–4 years (2.9) had the lowest. Females (4.7) averaged more services per patient than males (4.3).

## Over time

The total number of Medicare-subsidised mental health specific services increased from 6.2 million in 2008–09 to 12.1 million in 2018–19; an increase from 290.1 services per 1,000 population in 2008–09 to 480.8 in 2018–19 (Figure MBS.6). The increase in the rate of services was mostly due to increases in services provided by GPs (increase of 2.1 million from 2008–09 to 2018–19), followed by Psychological Therapy Services involving clinical psychologists (1.5 million), and other psychology services involving clinical psychologists and other psychologists (1.4 million). There was only a marginal increase in the rate of Medicare-subsidised mental health specific services delivered by psychiatrists; for all other providers there were increases in the rate of services delivered in recent years. The number of patients per provider has increased over time while the number of services per patient has fallen. Further information

on the new items that were added under the Better Access to Psychiatrists, Psychologists and General Practitioners through the MBS (Better Access) initiative in 2006–07 can be found in the data source section.

Figure MBS.6. Rate (per 1,000 population) of Medicare-subsidised mental health-specific services, by provider type, 2008-09 to 2018-19



## Data source

### Medicare Benefits Schedule data

The MBS data presented relate to services provided on a fee-for-service basis for which MBS benefits were paid. The year is determined from the date the service was processed by Medicare, rather than the date the service was provided. Patient counts for demographic characteristics (e.g. sex, age, postcode etc.) are derived from the last service processed in the reference period.

The Department of Human Services collects data on the activity of all persons making claims through the Medicare Benefits Scheme and provides this information to the Department of Health. Information collected includes the type of service provided (MBS item number) and the benefit paid by Medicare for the service. The item numbers and benefits paid by Medicare are based on the Medicare benefits schedule book ([DoH 2019](#)). Services that are not included in the MBS are not included in the data. The table below lists all MBS items that have been defined as mental health-specific.

#### Data Source MBS.1: Medicare-subsidised mental health-specific items

Provider type	Item group	MBS Group & Subgroup	MBS item numbers
Psychiatrists	Initial consultation new patient	Group A8	296, 297, 299
	Patient attendances—consulting room	Group A8	291, 293, 300, 302, 304, 306, 308, 310, 312, 314, 316, 318, 319
	Patient attendances—hospital	Group A8	320, 322, 324, 326, 328
	Patient attendances—other locations	Group A8	330, 332, 334, 336, 338
	Group psychotherapy	Group A8	342, 344, 346
	Interview with non-patient	Group A8	348, 350, 352

	Telepsychiatry	Group A8	288, 353, 355, 356, 357, 358, 359, 361, 364, 366, 367, 369, 370
	Case conferencing	Group A15	855, 857, 858, 861, 864, 866
	Electroconvulsive therapy	Group T1 Subgroup 13	14224
	Referred consultation for assessment, diagnosis and development of a treatment and management plan for autism or any other pervasive developmental disorder (PDD)	Group A8	289
General practitioners	GP Mental Health Treatment Plan—accredited	Group A20 Subgroup 1	281, 282, 2710(a), 2715, 2717
	GP Mental Health Treatment Plan—non-accredited	Group A20 Subgroup 1	272, 276, 2700, 2701, 2702(a)
	GP Mental Health Treatment—other	Group A20 Subgroup 1	277, 279, 894, 896, 898, 2121, 2150, 2196, 2712, 2713, 2719(a)
	Focussed Psychological Strategies	Group A20 Subgroup 2	283, 285, 286, 287, 371, 372, 2721, 2723, 2725, 2727, 2729, 2731
	Family Group Therapy	Group A6	170, 171, 172, 221, 222, 223
	Electroconvulsive therapy	Group T10	20104
	3 Step Mental Health Process—general practitioner(a)	Group A18 Subgroup 4	2574, 2575, 2577, 2578

	3 Step Mental Health Process —other medical practitioner(a)	Group A19 Subgroup 4	2704, 2705, 2707, 2708
Clinical psychologists	Psychological Therapy Services	Group M6	80000, 80001, 80005, 80010, 80011, 80015, 80020, 80021
Psychologists including clinical psychologists	Enhanced Primary Care	Group M3	10968
	Focussed Psychological Strategies (Allied Mental Health)	Group M7	80100, 80101, 80105, 80110, 80111, 80115, 80120, 80121
	Assessment and treatment of PDD	Group A10	82000, 82015
	Follow-up allied health service for Indigenous Australians	Group M11	81355
Other allied health providers	Enhanced Primary Care —mental health worker	Group M3	10956
	Focussed Psychological Strategies (Allied Mental Health)—occupational therapist	Group M7	80125, 80126, 80130, 80135, 80136, 80140, 80145, 80146
	Focussed Psychological Strategies (Allied Mental Health)—social worker	Group M7	80150, 80151, 80155, 80160, 80161, 80165, 80170, 80171
	Follow-up allied health services for Indigenous Australians— mental health worker	Group M11	81325

(a) Item discontinued.

(b) Item numbers have differing implementation and discontinuation dates. Details are available in the [Medicare Benefits Schedule books](#).

## Provider type important notes:

- General practitioners includes services provided by Medical practitioners, including General practitioners, but excluding specialists or consultant physicians.
- Clinical psychologist includes item numbers that can only be claimed by eligible Clinical psychologists.
- Other psychologist includes item numbers that can be claimed by any eligible psychologist, clinical and other. The proportion of activity claimed against these items by Clinical psychologists has not been estimated in the presented data. That is, the services rendered by Clinical psychologists will be present in both the Clinical psychologist and Other psychologist categories.

## Psychiatrist items—pre 1996

Restructuring of Group A8 items occurred as of 1 November 1996. Item numbers 134, 136, 138, 140 and 142 were discontinued as of 31 Oct 1996. Historical Psychiatrist data includes services claimed against these item numbers.

---

## References

DoH (Department of Health) 2019. Medicare Benefits Schedule Book, effective 14 September 2019. Viewed on 14 September 2019.

<<http://www.mbsonline.gov.au/internet/mbsonline/publishing.nsf/Content/downloads>>

---

## Key concepts

### Medicare-subsidised mental health-specific services

Key Concept	Description
<b>Medicare-subsidised general practitioner</b>	<b>Medicare-subsidised general practitioner (GP) services</b> are services provided by medical practitioners who are vocationally

---

---

**(GP) services** registered under Section 3F of the *Health Insurance Act 1973*, or are Fellows of the Royal Australian College of General Practitioners or Fellows of the Australian College of Rural and Remote Medicine and meet the requirements for the relevant Quality Assurance and Continuing Medical Education program or trainees for vocational registration (DoH 2019: 18). GP mental health services include services provided by medical practitioners, including general practitioners, but excluding psychiatrists (DoH 2019: 107–166, 190, 218, 276–278, 456,82 1219–1223).

**Medicare-subsidised other allied mental health services** **Medicare-subsidised other allied mental health services** are services provided by other allied mental health professionals such as occupational therapists, social workers and mental health nurses. These services cover focussed psychological strategies—**allied mental health** (occupational therapist and social worker items) and enhanced primary care—**allied health** (mental health worker item). Mental health workers include Aboriginal health workers, mental health nurses, occupational therapists and some social workers as well as psychologists. Although some psychologists are covered by this item they cannot be readily separated from the other mental health workers covered, so this item is counted under the heading of other allied mental health services. The [data source](#) section lists these item groups and MBS item numbers. For Medicare payments to be made on these items the provider (occupational therapist, social worker or other appropriate provider) must be registered with Medicare Australia as meeting the credentialing requirements for provision of the service (DoH 2019: 1225–1231, 1294–1299, 1314–1315).

**Medicare-subsidised psychiatrist services** **Medicare-subsidised psychiatrist services** are services provided by a psychiatrist (or, for electroconvulsive therapy, by either a psychiatrist or another medical practitioner together with an anaesthetist) on a fee-for-service basis that are partially or fully funded under the Australian Government's Medicare program. These services cover patient attendances (or consultations) provided in different settings as well as services such as group psychotherapy, telepsychiatry, case conferences and electroconvulsive therapy. These item groups along with the relevant MBS item numbers are listed in the [data source](#) section. Note that for items in the range 291 to 370 (MBS Group A8) and 855 to 866 (Case conference—consultant psychiatrist) only medical practitioners who are recognised as psychiatrists for the purposes of the *Health Insurance Act 1973* are

---

---

eligible to provide services attracting an MBS subsidy (DoH 2019: 69–72, 117–119, 227–237, 260–261, 323, 456).

**Medicare-subsidised psychologist services** are services provided by psychologists that are rebatable by Medicare through psychological therapy services, focussed psychological strategies and enhanced primary care items. The [data source](#) section lists these item groups with the relevant MBS item numbers. For these items to be eligible for Medicare rebates, the provider must meet the following eligibility requirements and be registered with Medicare Australia.

Medicare rebates for psychological therapy services are only available for services provided by clinical psychologists who are fully registered in the relevant jurisdiction and are members of, or eligible for membership with, the Australian Psychological Society's College of Clinical Psychologists. Clinical membership is only available for registered psychologists who have completed the standard 4 years of study in psychology and attained an accredited doctorate degree in clinical psychology or master's degree in clinical psychology with 1 year of supervised post-masters clinical psychology experience.

Medicare rebates for focussed psychological strategies and enhanced primary care are available for services provided by psychologists who are fully registered in the relevant jurisdiction regardless of any specialist clinical training. Registered psychologists must complete the standard 4 years of study in psychology with an additional 2 years of supervised practice, postgraduate coursework or a research degree, and meet any other jurisdiction-specific requirement for registration (DoH 2019: 77–78, 1219–1222, 1288–1291).

**Psychologist (other)** *Clinical psychologist* includes psychological therapy services provided only by clinical psychologists. *Psychologist (other)* includes services provided by both clinical psychologists and other psychologists (DoH 2019: 77–78, 1286–1287, 1225–1231, 1239–1244, 1291–1294, 1305–1308, 1337).