

Australians with eating disorders thrown a lifeline

Hundreds of thousands set to benefit from AUS-first allocation of eating disorder items on MBS¹

The lives of hundreds of thousands of Australians with eating disorders are set to improve from today (Friday, November 1, 2019) when major changes to the Medicare Benefits Schedule (MBS) take effect.¹

Up to 60 rebated treatment sessions, including 40 psychological and 20 dietetic sessions, will be available from today, to eligible Australians with eating disorders.^{1,2}

According to Clinical Psychologist and Director of the InsideOut Institute for Eating Disorders, Dr Sarah Maguire, Sydney, this Australian-first allocation of specific item numbers to eating disorders will offer those with eating disorders, the opportunity to begin recovery.²

"InsideOut Institute applauds the Government's reform to the MBS. This important change will vastly improve access to evidence-based treatment, involving an appropriately trained multidisciplinary healthcare team, which will ultimately save many lives.

"Previously, eating disorder treatment included only 10 rebated psychological therapy sessions and five rebated dietetic sessions. The increase in rebated sessions will save patients thousands of dollars and help ease the financial burden on those with eating disorders and their families," said Dr Maguire, who also served as a member of the Advisory Group to the MBS Review Taskforce and the Implementation Liaison Group for the eating disorder Medicare changes.

"The allocation of specific items numbers to eating disorders will bring our nation in line with local and international eating disorders treatment guidelines.

"The new national eating disorders guidelines recommend a skilled, multidisciplinary treatment approach to eating disorders, and access to up to 60 sessions, which will offer people the hope of recovery,"^{3,4} Dr Maguire said.

"An estimated one-in-20 Australians are living with an eating disorder.⁵ While eating disorders have one of the highest mortality rates of any mental illness,⁶ concerningly, more than 70 per cent of people with eating disorders do not receive treatment,⁷ and of those who do, only 20 per cent receive evidence-based treatment."⁸

There are four main types of eating disorders – Anorexia Nervosa, Bulimia Nervosa, Binge Eating Disorders and Other Specified Feeding or Eating Disorders.⁹ For the person affected, an eating disorder can become unrelenting torture. For families and loved ones, the burden of illness is among the highest of all mental illnesses.¹⁰ Eating disorders do not only affect only girls and young women. They can affect anyone, from any gender, or cultural background. They can commence at almost any age, but most commonly occur in adolescence.¹¹

Three-time Olympian, recently qualified medical doctor and InsideOut Institute ambassador, Jana Pittman, Sydney, waged an unrelenting, decade-long battle with Bulimia Nervosa during the peak of her sporting career. Today she is urging Australians affected by eating disorders, and medical professionals, to learn more about the Medicare rebates now available, and to seek professional support without delay.

"As someone who has lived with an eating disorder, and is now trained as a healthcare professional, I am very familiar with the various barriers faced by those who require professional help, but are not sure where to turn.

"A major barrier to accessing treatment is finding someone who is skilled, whom you can trust, who will empathise with you, and understand your situation," Ms Pittman said.

"I urge anyone living with an obsessive control of food, weight and body shape, to reach out for help. A good first step could be to use InsideOut Institute's simple online [screening tool](#) to determine whether they, or their loved one, may be living with an eating disorder, and to find out where to turn next for help.¹²

Health professionals who will be treating eating disorders under the MBS Scheme can access training from InsideOut Institute's [eLearning suite](#).¹³

"Those diagnosed with an eating disorder can also access InsideOut Institute's online Treatment Services Database¹⁴ to find a local healthcare professional with an interest in eating disorders," said Ms Pittman.

Concerningly, research indicates most healthcare practitioners feel ill-equipped to treat eating disorders,⁹ necessitating targeted training in the identification, assessment and treatment of those with eating disorders.

Medicare updates, reinforce the requirement for healthcare professionals to meet minimum training standards in order to make timely diagnoses and treatment of eating disorders," Ms Pittman said. **more#**

Advertising Art Director, Ash, 27, Sydney, began showing signs of an eating disorder at 19 years of age. It took more than a year of exhibiting worrisome food-related behaviours before Ash finally recognised she required professional help. She was subsequently diagnosed with Anorexia Nervosa.

"I realised what was going on wasn't normal, and my gross fear of food and the overwhelming control I needed, had to be addressed, as well as my depression. I then decided that I wanted to beat this, so I visited my GP," said Ash.

Over the ensuing three-and-a-half years, Ash experienced multiple relapses. Her illness took a significant toll on both her physical and mental health, her relationships and career.

"I know I'm one of the lucky ones, because I got the right treatment and support. However, some people cannot access the right treatment, diagnosis and support, which means they end up living with the wrath of their eating disorders for longer.

"I'm pleased to see the Medicare changes, because the more focus and resources that are allocated to eating disorders, the better," Ash said.

Mother-to-four, Bronny Carroll, Sydney, who has spent more than two decades caring for her daughter who was diagnosed with Anorexia Nervosa at 11 years of age, has similarly welcomed the Medicare updates.

"It's fantastic that the Government has finally acknowledged the significant toll of eating disorders.

"Eating disorders affect people across the board. Some families are forced to mortgage their homes, take their children out of school, and stop treatment, which is prohibitively expensive, and goes on and on. There's no quick fix.

"To have that financial burden shared is going to be life-changing for Australians living with eating disorders, and their carers'," said Ms Carroll.

According to InsideOut Institute Senior Clinical Dietitian, Gabriella Barclay, Sydney, any healthcare professional involved in the treatment journey of someone living with an eating disorder must be skilled in the preparation, review and provision of eating disorder treatment and management plans.

"We expect the Medicare changes will trigger an increase in Australians searching for qualified healthcare practitioners with specific training and expertise in the treatment of eating disorders.

"As a major eating disorder workforce development provider, InsideOut Institute delivers a range of online, evidence-based eLearning training packages. Our Eating Disorder Treatment Essentials training program has been shown to significantly improve healthcare professionals' confidence, knowledge and skills involving the treatment of eating disorders,"¹⁵ Ms Barclay said.

"I therefore urge any healthcare professional working with people with eating disorders, to consider upskilling, in order to best support their patients."

Should you suspect that you, or a loved one, may be living with an eating disorder, head to www.insideoutinstitute.org.au to complete their screener and assessment, and to access more information and professional support.

Healthcare professionals wishing to learn more about how to effectively treat Australians living with an eating disorder can visit www.insideoutinstitute.org.au/e-learning.

About the InsideOut Institute for Eating Disorders

The InsideOut Institute for Eating Disorders is a national institute for research and clinical excellence in eating disorders. IOI is housed in the Charles Perkins Centre at the University of Sydney, in a partnership with Sydney Local Health District. With resources, rigour and perseverance, InsideOut Institute aims to transform the treatment landscape for eating disorders in Australia, and to ultimately, find a cure. The Institute comprises a team of expert researchers, clinicians and public policy makers dedicated to solving the tyranny of eating disorders.

About InsideOut Institute's eLearning Suite

InsideOut Institute is a leader in developing and disseminating innovative training for health professionals in the identification, assessment and treatment of people with eating disorders. As a major eating disorders workforce development provider, InsideOut Institute delivers a suite of 10 online, evidence-based eLearning training packages which, to date, have trained thousands of clinicians nationwide.

National Eating Disorders Collaboration Reporting & Portrayal of Eating Disorders Best Practice Guide – <https://bit.ly/2JQp8ar>

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AVAILABLE FOR INTERVIEW: **Experts, people with lived experience of eating disorders & carers from**

VISION:**VNR FEATURING JANA PITTMAN & DR SARAH MAGUIRE AVAILABLE UPON REQUEST****DIGITAL MEDIA KIT:**www.eatingdisordersmediakit.com.au**References**

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