

# About ATAPS

## An introduction to Access To Allied Psychological Services

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The Access to Allied Psychological Services (ATAPS) initiative is an Australian Government program that was developed to improve the health outcomes of low income and disadvantaged people with mental health issues in the community.

Introduced in 2001, ATAPS is part of the Better Outcomes in Mental Health Care Program, and was developed to deliver short term, goal orientated, focussed psychological strategies to individuals with common mental disorders of mild to moderate severity. It is important that people referred to this program are likely to respond to short term interventions.

ATAPS consists of six programs for specific target groups that are outlined below. To be eligible for all of these, apart from the Suicide Prevention Service (SPS), people must be unable to access other types of service, such as Better Access, and/or private services. In general, people will be unable to pay for such services. It is up to a persons' GP to make the decision about eligibility.

People may receive a maximum of 12 individual sessions per year. The referring GP may in exceptional circumstances, recommend that the client receive an additional six sessions above those already provided.

Please note that people of all income brackets can access SPS.

Through ATAPS, people are also eligible for up to 12 separate group therapy sessions within one year. Groups should consist of 6-10 clients and group therapy does not count towards the individual mental health sessions in any year.

## Provisional referrals to ATAPS

There is provision under ATAPS for referrers who are not GPs, psychiatrists, or paediatricians to refer under a number of programs as outlined below.

Program	Provisional Referrers
Child Mental Health	School psychologists/counsellors/ school principals/assistant principals, ATAPS eligible Allied Health Professionals (AHPs) (an AHP may not refer someone to themselves or to someone in the same practice) directors of pre-schools and childcare centres, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander health workers, medical officers in non-government organisations (NGOs).
Perinatal Depression	Maternal and child health nurses
Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders	Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander health workers

Where there is a provisional referral the AHP is required to link the client into a GP for a mental health treatment plan prior to the third session of treatment.

## ATAPS providers

ATAPS mental health professionals include psychologists, accredited mental health social workers, credentialed mental health nurses, occupational therapists with mental health experience and Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander health workers with mental health qualifications. Only some private providers are eligible to provide ATAPS and only some of those may provide Suicide Prevention Services. Similarly, Child Mental Health and Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander Services are only allocated to clinicians with expertise in those areas.

## Exceptional circumstances

The referring practitioner may recommend that extra sessions be allocated when there is a significant change in the person's clinical condition or care circumstances which justifies

increasing the maximum number of sessions available. Please call EMPHN intake on 9800 1071 to discuss approval of exceptional circumstances. If approved details of the exceptional circumstances must be outlined on the exceptional circumstances referral form.

### **Mild to moderate mental health disorders**

It is the responsibility of the referring practitioner to consider whether the person will respond to short term treatment.

Please note that there are times where the judgement of a referring practitioner can be that a person with *serious mental illness* has an issue that will respond to short term interventions. If this is the case, a referral may be made but this issue must be clarified before acceptance of the referral.

### **Relationship to the Medicare Better Access System**

Clients cannot be referred for treatment to psychiatrists, psychologists, social workers or occupational therapists through the Medicare Benefits Schedule (MBS) Better Access initiative and ATAPS in the same calendar year. The only exception to this is a referral to SPS. A change from Better Access to ATAPS may however be appropriate if a client's individual circumstances have changed. These circumstances may include:

- changes in location where the person is no longer able to access Better Access services, or
- financial circumstances change and they are no longer able to meet the co-payments associated with Better Access services.