



## Answers to some frequently asked questions about Medicare non-directive pregnancy support counselling services

### Which Medicare Benefits Schedule (MBS) items apply?

There are four (4) MBS items for the provision of non-directive pregnancy support counselling services:

- Item 4001 - provided by eligible GPs;
- Item 81000 – provided by eligible psychologists, on referral from a GP;
- Item 81005 – provided by eligible social workers, on referral from a GP; and
- Item 81010 – provided by eligible mental health nurses, on referral from a GP.

*Note: 'GP' is used to refer to a medical practitioner (including a general practitioner, but not including a specialist or consultant physician).*

### Can the services only be accessed by women considering an abortion?

The services are available to all women who are concerned about a current pregnancy or a pregnancy that occurred in the preceding 12 months. They may be used to address any pregnancy related issues for which non-directive counselling is appropriate.

### What is non-directive counselling?

This is a form of counselling based on the understanding that, in many situations, people can resolve their own problems without being provided with a solution by the counsellor. The counsellor's role is to encourage the person to express their feelings but not suggest what decision the person should make. By listening and reflecting back what the person reveals to them, the counsellor helps them to explore and understand their feelings. With this understanding, the person is able to make the decision that is best for them.

### What kind of information will practitioners provide during the service?

The service involves the GP, psychologist, social worker or mental health nurse undertaking a safe, confidential process that helps the patient explore concerns they have about a pregnancy.

This includes providing unbiased, evidence-based information about all options and services available to the patient, where requested. This could include information on all options in relation to a pregnancy, such as:

- continuing the pregnancy and keeping the baby;
- continuing the pregnancy and adopting out the baby; and
- terminating the pregnancy.

## **Who can provide the services?**

GPs who are registered with Medicare Australia as having completed appropriate non-directive pregnancy counselling training will be able to provide non-directive pregnancy support counselling services using item 4001.

Psychologists, social workers and mental health nurses registered with Medicare Australia as having met specific eligibility criteria and completed appropriate non-directive pregnancy counselling training will be able to provide these services using item 81000, 81005 or 81010 respectively, where an eligible patient is referred to them by a GP.

These criteria are listed in the Pregnancy Support Counselling fact sheet available on the Department of Health and Ageing's website at [www.health.gov.au](http://www.health.gov.au).

## **What does non-directive pregnancy counselling training entail?**

GPs, psychologists, social workers and mental health nurses wishing to provide the service will undertake non-directive pregnancy counselling training modules based on key training criteria developed by the Department of Health and Ageing in consultation with the National Pregnancy Counselling Expert Advisory Committee, the Royal Australian College of General Practitioners (RACGP) and relevant allied health professional colleges.

It is envisaged that the training will be incorporated into existing continuing professional development programs and recognised training programs for each professional group.

## **Will eligible practitioners be independent of abortion providers?**

GPs, psychologists, social workers and mental health nurses who have a direct pecuniary (financial) interest in a health service that has, as its primary purpose, the provision of pregnancy termination services, cannot provide non-directive pregnancy support counselling services under Medicare.

## **How do eligible practitioners register with Medicare Australia?**

Eligible practitioners should contact the following professional peak bodies for advice on how to register with Medicare Australia to provide these services:

- Royal Australian College of General Practitioners (RACGP) at [www.racgp.org.au](http://www.racgp.org.au);
- Australian College of Rural and Remote Medicine (ACRRM) at [www.acrrm.org.au](http://www.acrrm.org.au);
- Australian Psychological Society at [www.aps.org.au](http://www.aps.org.au);
- Australian Association of Social Workers at [www.aasw.asn.au](http://www.aasw.asn.au); and
- Australian College of Mental Health Nurses at [www.acmhn.org](http://www.acmhn.org).

Advice is also available from Medicare Australia on its provider inquiry line: **132 150**.

## **How will GPs refer patients to eligible allied health professionals?**

Referrals will be made by letter or note, signed and dated by the referring GP.

Allied health professionals must be in receipt of the referral at the first service and must retain the referral for two (2) years from the date of the service, for Medicare Australia auditing purposes.

Patients may be referred to more than one allied health professional for services (e.g. where a patient does not wish to continue receiving services from the provider they were referred to in the first instance).

A new referral is required for each pregnancy or where the patient wishes to be referred to a different practitioner.

## **How many services will attract a Medicare rebate?**

Patients will be able to claim up to three (3) non-directive pregnancy support counselling services in total per pregnancy using items 4001, 81000, 81005 and/or 81010, where all the requirements of the service are met.

Partners of eligible patients may attend counselling sessions. However, only one fee applies to each service (the fee charged to the patient).

## **What Medicare rebates apply?**

For the item 4001, the rebate is \$67.80. The bulk billing incentives (MBS item 10990 or 10991) can be claimed in conjunction with item 4001 provided the conditions of the relevant item (10990 or 10991) are satisfied.

For the items 81000, 81005 and 81010, the rebate is \$56.20.

Eligible patients can access up to three (3) rebates (in total) for these services, per pregnancy. Out-of-pocket costs incurred for eligible services count towards the extended Medicare safety net.

## **Why are these services necessary?**

At approximately 90,000 abortions each year, Australia has one of the highest abortion rates in the western world.

While there is already a range of pregnancy counselling services available to women and their partners, women may be unaware of available services or may find it difficult to access them, particularly in rural areas and after hours.

It is important that women are able to access non-directive counselling when they are concerned about a pregnancy, and that they are able to do so quickly. By providing MBS items for this purpose, a broad network of service providers becomes available, increasing the likelihood that women will be able to get the support they need.

The items are complemented by the National Pregnancy Support Telephone Helpline which assists women in areas where access to appropriate GP and allied health professional services may be limited. The Helpline also benefits those who need

assistance after hours, and provide a quality service option for those who prefer to remain anonymous or to receive counselling and advice in a non-clinical setting. Women's partners will also be able to receive advice from the Helpline.

### **Further information**

Further information about these items can be found in the Department of Health and Ageing's fact sheets at [www.health.gov.au](http://www.health.gov.au). It is also contained in the main 1 November 2007 MBS Book and the MBS Allied Health Services Book. Both of these publications are available online at [www.health.gov.au/mbsonline](http://www.health.gov.au/mbsonline).

Specific information about the Medicare billing and payment process for these items is also available to providers on the Medicare Australia provider inquiry line on **132 150** and to patients on its customer inquiry line on **132 011**.