

**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

## **PACFA calls for the proposed 'Psychology Assistant' role to be removed from psychology training redesign**

**Melbourne, 22 June 2026:** The Psychotherapy and Counselling Federation of Australia (PACFA) is calling on the Australian Government and the Psychology Board of Australia to remove the proposed "Psychology Assistant" role from the current redesign of psychology training. PACFA warns the proposal would commit public funding to a new, undefined and potentially unregulated workforce, one for which no case has yet been made while tens of thousands of qualified, registered counsellors and psychotherapists remain profoundly underutilised.

PACFA does not oppose reform in principle and supports a pathway that is fit for purpose. But it does not support the proposed Bachelor of Psychological Assistance, or the embedding of a new psychology assistant workforce, without further scoping, consultation and clear differentiation from counselling, psychotherapy and other mental health roles. As PACFA states in its submission, its primary concern is role clarity.

"We welcome reform that strengthens the mental health workforce," said Johanna de Wever, CEO of PACFA. "But the answer to a workforce shortage cannot be to create a brand-new, undefined role and fund it from the public purse, while a trained, regulated and ready workforce sits underused. That is not workforce reform, it risks repeating the very mistakes that have held counselling back for a decade."

### **Background**

In September 2024, the Australian Government commissioned and funded the Psychology Board of Australia (under AHPRA) to redesign psychology training. The Board launched its review on 31 March 2025, describing it as a "once in a generation opportunity to simplify the way we train psychologists." The central proposal of replacing the current six-year pathway with a single, integrated five-year degree is a direction PACFA supports. PACFA's concern is with the secondary element: a three-year exit point awarding a "Bachelor of Psychological Assistance" and creating a new "Psychology Assistant" role that is, on the evidence presented, undefined in scope, training, accreditation and regulatory status. The consultation closed on 10 June 2026, and PACFA lodged a formal submission.

### **The right problem, the wrong answer**

The proposal offers no evidence of demand for a Psychology Assistant workforce, and instead identifies leakage from existing psychology training. Meanwhile an estimated 25,000–45,000 counsellors are recorded under ABS data, more than 80 programs graduate over 1,500 new counsellors each year, with PACFA representing more than 12,000 members holding the highest counselling qualifications nationally.



This workforce is ready now: surveys indicate around 60% of counsellors could see a new client within two weeks, and one in four within 24 hours. Their underutilisation was formally acknowledged by the Government in October 2025 with the **National Standards for Counsellors and Psychotherapists**.

Those Standards were the product of two years of national reform, setting clear expectations for education, supervision, ethics and professional practice across the counselling and psychotherapy workforce. To now propose a new, undefined *Psychology Assistant* role runs directly counter to the rigour the Government has only recently brought to this part of the mental health workforce.

The irony is hard to overlook: the proposal would fund a new, undefined workforce while a trained, regulated and immediately available one is left on the sidelines.

### **An undefined role, and a potential risk to public safety**

PACFA's central concern is role clarity. The consultation leaves critical questions unanswered: whether the role is clinical or non-clinical; its title, scope and exclusions; supervision, accreditation and complaints requirements; and its relationship to counsellors, psychotherapists, registered psychologists and other mental health roles. The title "Psychology Assistant" implies a limited, supervised, non-clinical role - PACFA's stated preference - and without clear boundaries it is impossible to support a new clinical role. The risks are real: several mental health titles, including "counsellor," are not legally protected, and the model may split responsibility for public safety between AHPRA and state Health Complaints Commissioners. In May 2026 the NSW Health Care Complaints Commission issued a prohibition order against Frankie Bailey (aka Dr Allan Bailey) which PACFA cites as evidence of 'bad actors' exploiting community confusion enabled by a lack of title protection.

### **The fix already exists**

Rather than funding an unproven role, government and regulators should better use the qualified workforce already in place and address the chronic gaps in allied health regulation. PACFA has advocated strongly for a statutory co-regulation framework for allied health, including counselling and psychotherapy, as recommended in the Independent Review of the Complexity of the National Regulation and Accreditation Scheme last year. Such a framework would deliver legislation-backed registration, title protection, and clear complaints and accountability mechanisms. PACFA's view is that the question of whether the Bachelor of Psychological Assistance should be a standalone or exit degree is premature; the prior question is whether the role is needed at all, what problem it solves, and how it differs from existing roles. On the current evidence, the proposed revisions are premature and under-developed.

### **PACFA recommends that the Australian Government and the Psychology Board:**

- 1. Remove the Psychology Assistant role from the current pathway redesign proposal.**
- 2. Consider any such role only through a separate, dedicated consultation** with counselling and psychotherapy peak bodies, employers, consumers and education providers.
- 3. Direct investment toward the workforce we already have**, better utilising registered counsellors and psychotherapists, and progressing statutory co-regulation of allied health allowing for a legally-backed registration scheme that would finally protect the titles.

**- ENDS -**

### **About Psychotherapy and Counselling Federation of Australia (PACFA)**

The Psychotherapy and Counselling Federation of Australia (PACFA) is the leading national peak body for tertiary-qualified counsellors and psychotherapists. With more than 12,000 members, PACFA provides registration and

quality assurance for counsellors nationally. PACFA members registered as Clinical Counsellors, Certified Practising Counsellors and Clinical Psychotherapists are fully qualified allied health practitioners as recognised by PACFA's full membership of Allied Health Professionals Australia (AHPA). PACFA is also a qualifying member of the National Alliance of Self-Regulating Health Professions (NASRHP) and a key advisor to the National Standards for Counsellors and Psychotherapists project funded by the Department of Health, Ageing and Disability.

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