

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Counselling students left out again as Commonwealth Prac Payment expands to ten new professions

Melbourne, 24 July 2026: The Psychotherapy and Counselling Federation of Australia (PACFA) has welcomed yesterday's expansion of the Commonwealth Prac Payment while raising concern that counselling and psychotherapy students have again been left out.

The Prime Minister announced the expansion at the Labor National Conference in Adelaide. The scheme, which currently supports eligible students in teaching, nursing, midwifery and social work, will be extended from 1 July 2027 to clinical psychology, physiotherapy, occupational therapy, speech pathology, paramedicine, podiatry, radiography, pharmacy, rehabilitation therapies and audiology. The expansion involves an additional investment of \$158.4 million and is expected to support more than 20,000 additional students.

Counselling and psychotherapy students remain excluded.

PACFA CEO Johanna de Wever said that the expansion was a welcome outcome for the professions covered by it, but that the continued omission of counselling and psychotherapy was difficult to reconcile, particularly in light of the government's own mental health commitments.

"Placement poverty is real and it pushes good people out of the professions we need most. Students who are working unpaid while covering rent, transport and living costs are the ones most likely to drop out. These pressures can disproportionately exclude students from lower income, regional and diverse communities, limiting the diversity of the future health workforce.

"Counselling and psychotherapy students complete substantial mandatory supervised placement as part of their training. Under the National Standards for Counsellors and Psychotherapists, which the Australian Government released in October last year, placement is a formal requirement of qualification. Like students in the professions newly added to the scheme, they work with real clients, under qualified supervision, in services that are already stretched.

"We now have national standards that set clear expectations for education, supervision and practice. What we do not have is any recognition of counselling students in the support the government provides to help people get through that training."

For more than two decades, PACFA has advocated for national recognition of appropriately qualified counsellors and psychotherapists. Since the Commonwealth Prac Payment was announced, PACFA has consistently called for counselling and psychotherapy students to be included alongside other allied health professions.

Ms de Wever said PACFA's position is that students in PACFA-accredited programs meet the standard the scheme is designed to support. More than 2,800 students are currently enrolled in PACFA-accredited



programs. Every one of them completes supervised client placement as part of their qualification. None will be supported under the expanded scheme.

Ms de Wever said good training accreditation should be the mechanism that gives government confidence to extend support.

"PACFA has long been concerned about the variability in counselling training delivered by providers who do not seek PACFA accreditation. Once again, a lack of rigour in some areas of training, and the absence of title protection for tertiary degree-qualified counsellors, has disadvantaged the entire profession.

"PACFA-accredited programs already meet the standard the government is looking for. Our registrants meet or exceed the requirements set out in the National Standards. We are not asking for an exception. We are asking for students who are already undertaking rigorous, nationally benchmarked training to be treated consistently with students in other frontline allied health professions.

"Australians need timely and affordable access to mental health support. Counsellors and psychotherapists are part of the answer, particularly in communities where access to other mental health services is limited. The government has recognised the importance of this workforce through its own National Standards. Supporting the students training to join it would be consistent with that position."

PACFA is writing to the Minister for Health seeking a meeting to discuss the inclusion of counselling and psychotherapy students in future rounds of the scheme.

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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, Disability and Ageing

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