

Productivity Commission Inquiry into the increased application of competition, contestability and informed user choice to human services

As a counsellor employed by a not-for-profit organisation in the rural area, I cannot emphasise strongly enough the importance of this service remaining available to our local community as a reliable and vital resource. Despite the absolute fact that these resources are already too slim and constantly over-burdened by demand, they are an essential commodity to an area that is so often excluded from other options or services by distance and financial restraints. It also suffers particular hardships not common to metropolitan areas (fire, flood, drought, local suicide rates etc.). I have been working in this organisation as a counsellor for fourteen years and am acutely aware of the amount of clients who, by virtue of an hour's session weekly, fortnightly, or even monthly, are maintained as useful community members without the need for involvement in the more costly acute services they would otherwise find necessary. For many in our local community with diagnosed mental illnesses both severe and moderate, there are very few alternative services available without considerable financial impact and even those that are available are very 'thin on the ground'. It is my substantial fear that a vast demographic of the rural community would not have the financial capacity to engage with 'for-profit' services and thereby 'fall through the cracks'. Another concern of significance I have is for the goodwill, reputation, and skills of current not-for-profit services in our area that would potentially be lost to a community that has grown to have confidence and faith in these services. The answer to the shortage of workers in the mental health area is not to uproot what is available, it is my belief the more appropriate path is to fund greater resources to that which is already functioning.