

AN UPDATED ANALYSIS OF THE MEDICARE BETTER ACCESS MENTAL HEALTH PROGRAM

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EXPLANATIONS AND DISCUSSION

Medicare reimbursements to GPs, psychologists and other mental health professionals for services provided under the Better Access program continue to grow at an exponential rate. The program delivered 3.719 million services in 2008 at a cost of \$363.5 million dollars. This represents an increase of 47% in services and 48% in costs over 2007. These figures do not include services provided by psychiatrists (around \$200 million) and it does not include the cost of education and training (although it appears that education and training programs have been slow to be rolled out and are well under budget).

General Practitioners

Services provided by GPs cost \$152 million (42%).

This included 557,864 GP mental health plans and 190,877 reviews of mental health plans (See Figure 1)

In 2007 there were 469,804 GP mental health plans. Assuming these plans are reviewed annually, only 190,877 (40%) of 2007 plans were reviewed in 2008. What does this mean for continuity of services to patients?

In 2008 GPs provided 629,362 mental health consultations, an increase of almost 50% over 2007 (See Figure 2).

GPs also provided 36,477 focussed psychological strategies to their patients – a figure little changed from 2007. These services are only reimbursed when provided by GPs who have received the appropriate training which most GPs would have received under the now defunct Better Outcomes in Mental Health program. It appears that while GPs are seeing more patients for mental health problems, fewer GPs are receiving specific training to help them manage these patients.

Psychologists

Services provided by psychologists cost 202.6 million (56%).

The number of services provided by clinical psychologists increased 64% over 2007; the number of services provided by general psychologists increased by 46% (See Figures 3 & 4).

56% of psychology services are provided by general psychologists.

Other mental health professionals

Services provided by occupational therapists cost \$1.6 million in 2008 (20,917 services compared to 9,301 in 2007). Services increased by 125% over 2007. However it appears that these services, which grew rapidly from a low base in 2007, have leveled off since July 2008 (See Figure 5).

Services provided by social workers cost \$7.3 million in 2008 (101,667 services compared to 48,304 in 2007). Like occupational therapists' services, these also grew dramatically (by 110%), but the growth rate has leveled off since July 2008 (See Figure 6).

How many patients are getting mental health services under this program?

Assuming 1 plan / patient, these figures indicate that the maximum number of patients treated under the Better Access program in 2008 was 748,741 – up from 580,430 in 2007.

A total of 2.970 million services were provided to these patients. This averages around 4 services / patient with a mental health plan. This is up from around 3.5 services / patient in 2007.

How services are distributed / by state and territory

(see Table 2)

64% of Better Access services went to NSW and Victoria, states with 57% of the population. The Northern Territory received less than one-third of the services it should have received on a population basis.

South Australia did better than expected on a population basis in several areas of such as GP delivered focused psychological strategies, clinical psychology services and occupational therapy services. Previous work has also shown that South Australia receives the highest number of Better Access funded psychiatric services when these are considered on a population basis. However general psychology services are lower than expected.

Western Australia received a high number of clinical psychology services on a population basis, but general psychology services are low.

Workforce shortages may account for the low rates of services in Tasmania, the ACT and the Northern Territory.

How services are distributed / age sex and age

(see Table 3)

58% of services go to patients aged 15-44, despite the fact that this age group represents only 42.8% of the population, and two-thirds of these services go to women.

Services provided to the age group 45-64 is in line with the population, although again, two-thirds of these services are to women.

The younger aged groups (0-14) are underserved, although this is the only segment of the population where males receive more services than females – they get 55% of the services.

The oldest ages groups (65 and over) are also greatly underserved.

Use of GP mental health plans

The greatest increases in uptake are seen for children and young adults.

Across all age groups there is a slightly greater increase for males than for females.

However young people and males are less likely to have their mental health plans reviewed.

Use of GP mental health services

These services are provided primarily to females aged 25-54.

Greater than average increases are seen for younger (1-14) and older patients (aged 65+) of both sexes.

GP delivered FPS services

As noted previously there has been little growth in these services over 2007 levels, and it appears that men are increasingly less likely to receive these services.

There has been some growth in FPS services provided to women 85+.

Clinical psychology services

Women received almost twice as many services as men, and 43% of all services were delivered to women aged 25-54. However the rate of provision of services for males of all ages has increased at a higher rate than for women.

The greatest increases were seen in services to young females aged 0-14 and females aged 85+.

The majority of services delivered were for sessions of at least 50 minutes (Medicare rebate \$115:00)

Psychologist delivered FPS services

Two thirds of these services were delivered to women, mostly to those aged 25-54. However as noted for clinical psychology services, the rate of provision of services for males of all ages has increased at a higher rate than for women.

The greatest increases over 2007 are seen for the youngest and oldest ages groups of both sexes.

Again, the majority of services delivered were for sessions of at least 50 minutes (Medicare rebate \$78.40)

Occupational therapist delivered FPS services

Although increases over 2007 appear substantial, the actual numbers of services delivered are relatively small.

37% of services are to males aged 0-14, with one quarter of all services going to males aged 5-14.

Social workers delivered FPS services

Females use more services than males in all aged groups other than 5-14.

The greatest increase in services over 2007 is for males aged 75-84.

Table 1: Better access to GPs, psychologists and other mental health professionals

2008 data – services and cost
2007 data provided in italics for comparison

Item	Jan	Feb	Mar	Apr	May	June	Jul	Aug	Sept	Oct	Nov	Dec	Total services	Cost (\$m)
2710 GP mh plan	35,678 <i>32,822</i>	47,483 <i>39,891</i>	42,122 <i>44,197</i>	46,834 <i>32,965</i>	50,128 <i>48,047</i>	46,650 <i>37,972</i>	48,950 <i>37,381</i>	46,986 <i>42,091</i>	48,164 <i>38,312</i>	53,359 <i>40,047</i>	48,536 <i>42,173</i>	42,972 <i>33,908</i>	557,864 <i>469,804</i>	85.8 <i>70.7</i>
2712 Review mh plan	12,443 <i>2,433</i>	15,220 <i>3,919</i>	13,297 <i>6,117</i>	15,485 <i>6,057</i>	17,054 <i>10,340</i>	15,448 <i>9,099</i>	16,929 <i>10,780</i>	16,559 <i>12,260</i>	16,712 <i>11,675</i>	18,702 <i>13,016</i>	17,095 <i>13,140</i>	15,933 <i>11,796</i>	190,877 <i>110,626</i>	19.6 <i>11.1</i>
2713 GP mh consult	38,844 <i>21,332</i>	45,572 <i>26,616</i>	41,882 <i>32,015</i>	47,690 <i>27,074</i>	52,691 <i>39,705</i>	50,879 <i>34,186</i>	56,138 <i>36,349</i>	54,461 <i>40,612</i>	57,587 <i>30,559</i>	65,392 <i>42,146</i>	59,956 <i>44,100</i>	58,270 <i>38,947</i>	629,362 <i>422,641</i>	42.7 <i>28.1</i>
2721-2727 GP FPS	2,392 <i>2,585</i>	3,253 <i>2,789</i>	2,973 <i>3,348</i>	3,153 <i>2,548</i>	3,353 <i>3,232</i>	3,219 <i>2,782</i>	3,275 <i>3,316</i>	3,080 <i>3,244</i>	2,968 <i>3,046</i>	3,134 <i>3,325</i>	2,944 <i>3,093</i>	2,733 <i>2,766</i>	36,477 <i>36,094</i>	3.9 <i>3.7</i>
80000-80020 Clin psych	40,240 <i>11,677</i>	55,551 <i>20,679</i>	56,115 <i>32,138</i>	63,965 <i>30,685</i>	70,888 <i>44,055</i>	66,960 <i>42,519</i>	71,274 <i>43,939</i>	68,459 <i>50,380</i>	71,476 <i>47,134</i>	74,787 <i>49,895</i>	70,849 <i>56,217</i>	71,545 <i>48,071</i>	782,131 <i>477,389</i>	90.1 <i>53.7</i>
80100-80120 Gen Psych	78,021 <i>30,344</i>	100,968 <i>47,740</i>	104,132 <i>67,426</i>	117,820 <i>61,928</i>	123,545 <i>88,675</i>	116,570 <i>84,576</i>	129,041 <i>88,289</i>	120,552 <i>97,122</i>	123,620 <i>92,049</i>	134,110 <i>100,194</i>	124,725 <i>106,531</i>	126,349 <i>95,428</i>	1,399,453 <i>960,302</i>	112.5 <i>74.9</i>
80125-80145 Occ ther	900 <i>105</i>	1,480 <i>239</i>	1,226 <i>343</i>	1,574 <i>424</i>	1,820 <i>688</i>	1,601 <i>664</i>	2,252 <i>726</i>	1,717 <i>1,079</i>	1,907 <i>1,144</i>	1,994 <i>1,170</i>	2,332 <i>1,423</i>	2,114 <i>1,296</i>	20,917 <i>9,301</i>	1.6 <i>0.7</i>
80150-80170 Soc wkr	4,839 <i>877</i>	6,648 <i>1,588</i>	6,988 <i>2,679</i>	8,221 <i>2,490</i>	8,747 <i>3,927</i>	8,570 <i>3,863</i>	9,865 <i>4,240</i>	9,112 <i>5,119</i>	9,518 <i>5,161</i>	9,871 <i>5,741</i>	9,122 <i>6,634</i>	10,166 <i>5,962</i>	101,667 <i>48,304</i>	7.3 <i>3.4</i>
Total													3,718,748 <i>2,534,461</i>	363.5 <i>246.3</i>

Figure 1

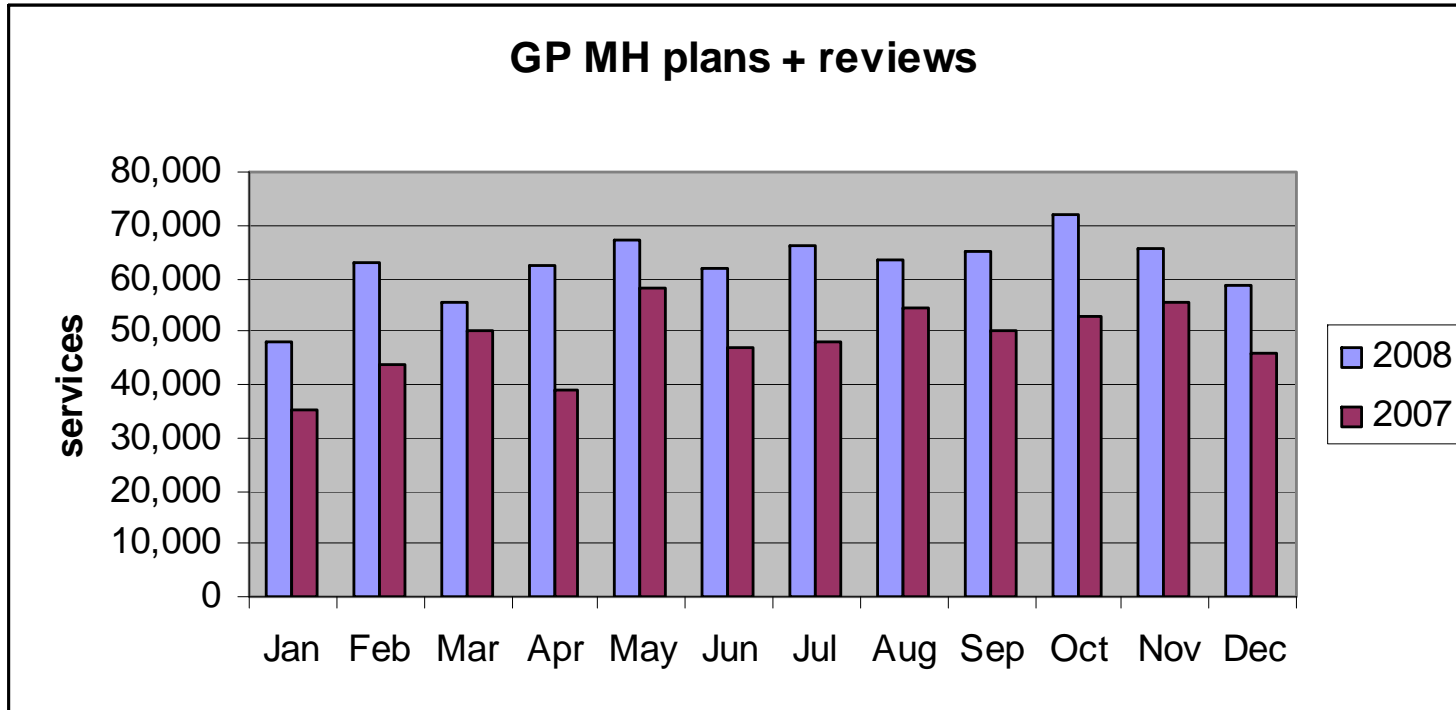


Figure 2

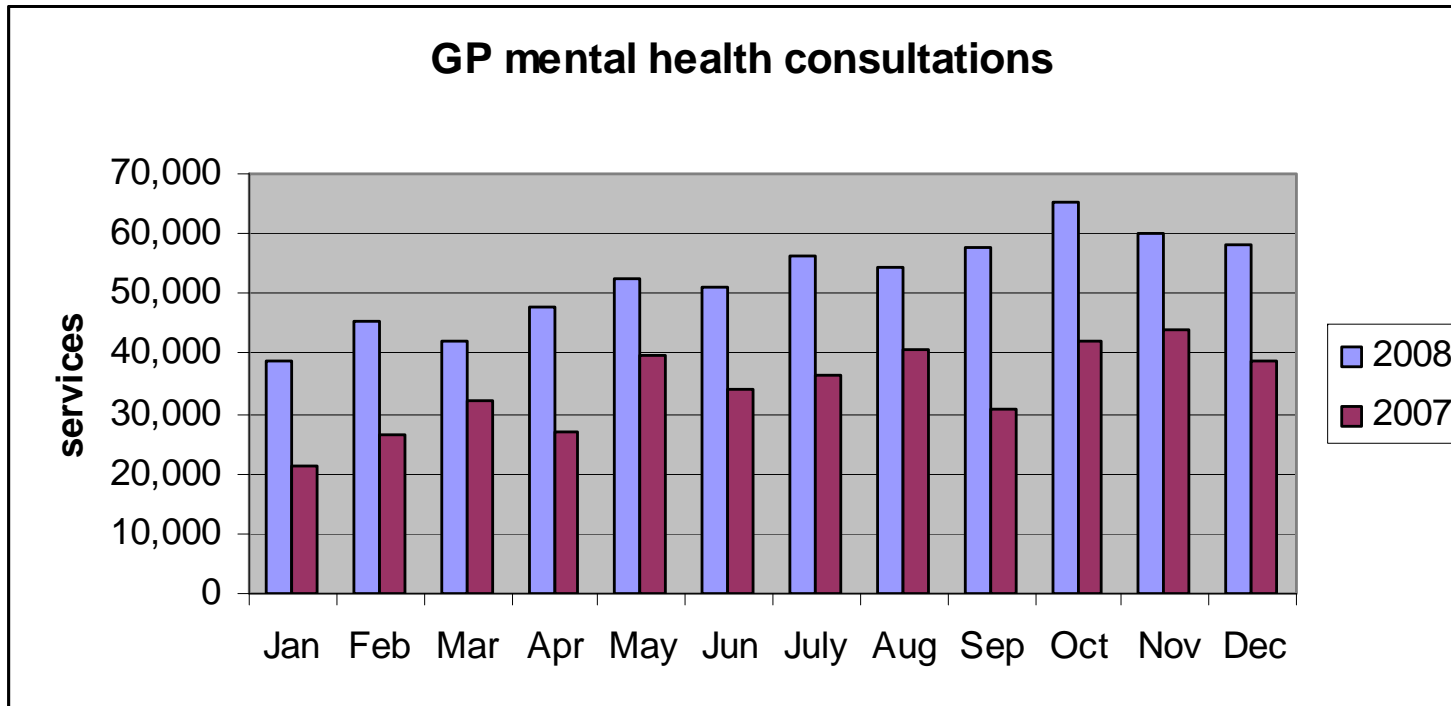


Figure 3

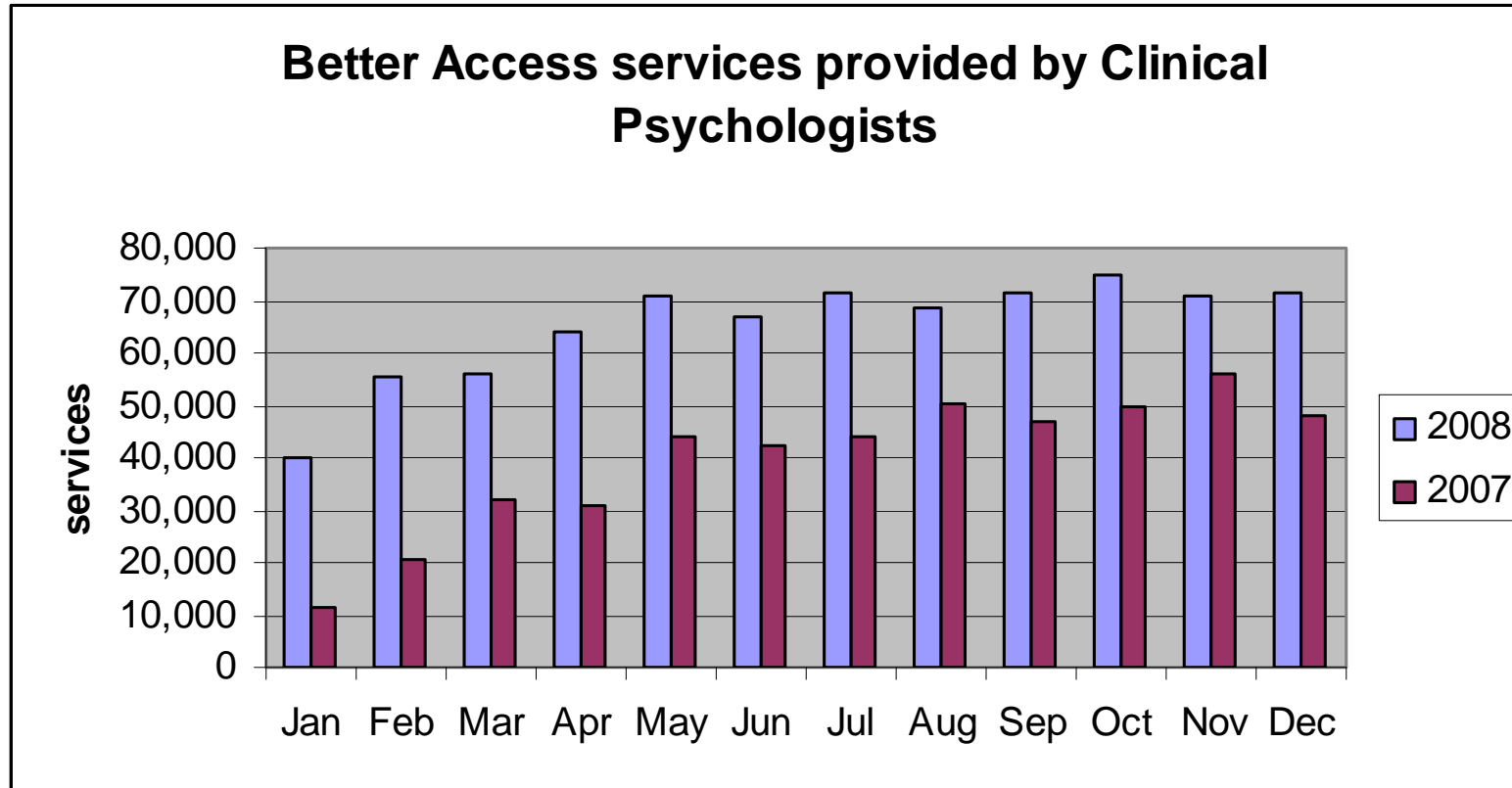


Figure 4:

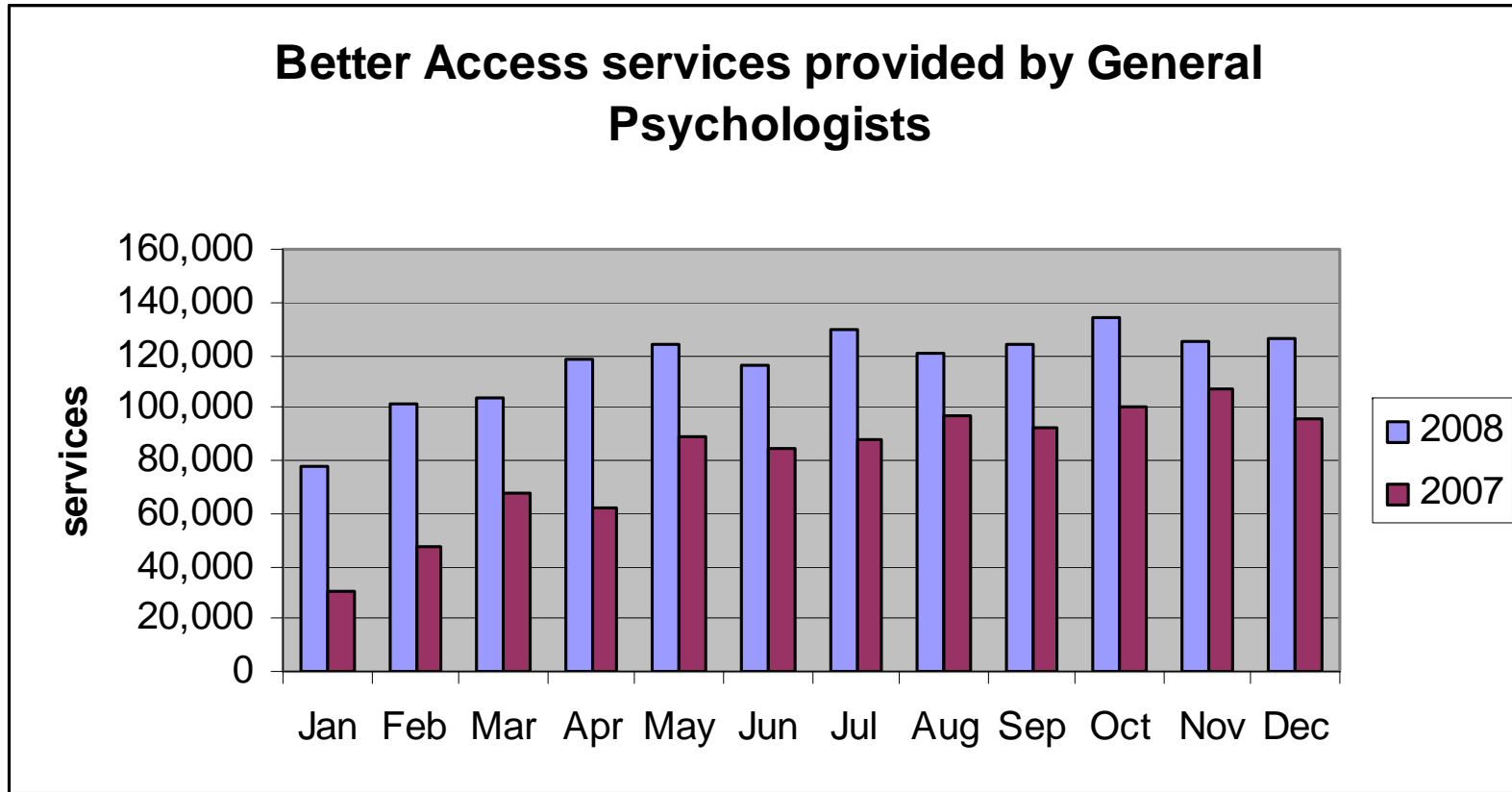


Figure 5

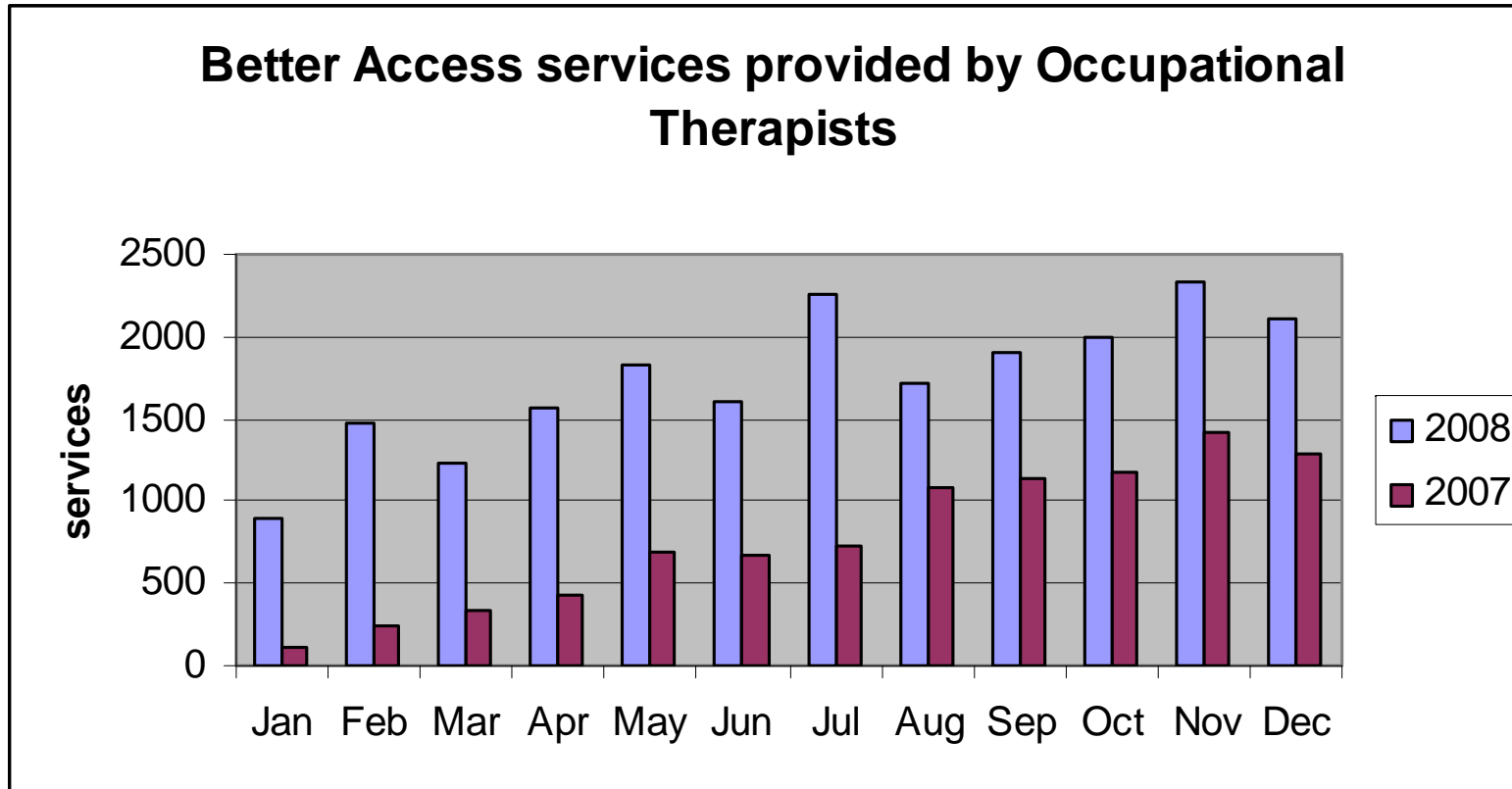
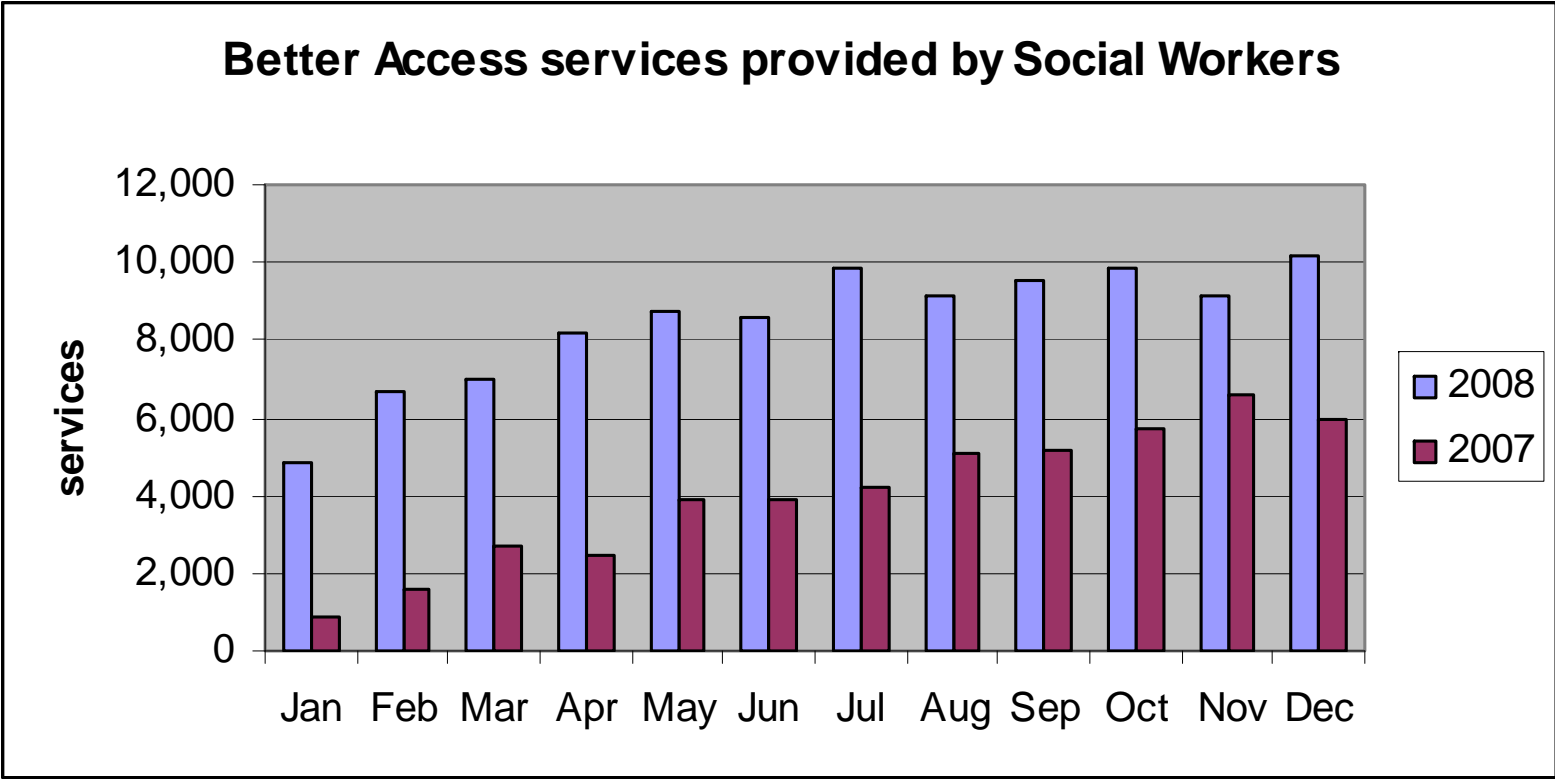


Figure 6



**Table 2: Delivery of Better Access services by State and Territory
Calendar year 2008**

	NSW	Vic	Qld	SA	WA	Tas	ACT	NT	Total
Popln (m) (%)	6.967 (32.6)	5.298 (24.8)	4.279 (20.0)	1.602 (7.5)	2.163 (10.1)	0.498 (2.3)	0.344 (1.6)	0.220 (1.0)	21.374
GP mh plans (%)	191,415 (34.3)	158,571 (28.4)	101,338 (18.2)	36,723 (6.6)	48,323 (8.7)	11,282 (2.0)	7,912 (1.4)	2,300 (0.4)	557,864
GP plans review (%)	66,313 (34.7)	57,537 (30.1)	32,171 (16.8)	11,302 (5.9)	17,192 (9.0)	3,620 (1.9)	2,256 (1.2)	486 (0.2)	190,877
GP mh consults (%)	211,210 (33.6)	173,116 (27.5)	116,433 (18.5)	50,129 (8.0)	57,361 (9.1)	11,463 (1.8)	6,613 (1.0)	3,037 (0.5)	629,363
GP FPS (%)	13,192 (36.2)	10,642 (29.2)	6,421 (17.6)	4,079 (11.2)	1,364 (3.7)	313 (0.8)	329 (0.9)	137 (0.4)	36,477
Clin psych (%)	255,320 (32.6)	202,259 (25.8)	91,485 (11.7)	63,968 (8.2)	128,894 (16.5)	25,506 (3.3)	13,184 (1.7)	1,515 (0.2)	782,131
Gen psych (%)	458,337 (32.7)	496,955 (35.5)	273,999 (19.6)	54,667 (3.9)	65,741 (4.7)	22,751 (1.6)	22,601 (1.6)	4,402 (0.3)	1,399,453
Occ ther (%)	7,736 (37.0)	5,799 (27.7)	2,767 (13.2)	2,251 (10.8)	1,689 (8.1)	530 (2.5)	38 (0.2)	7 (0)	20,917
Soc wkr (%)	35,331 (34.7)	34,430 (33.9)	14,798 (14.5)	6,968 (6.8)	7,387 (7.3)	2,139 (2.1)	445 (0.4)	169 (0.2)	101,667
Total services (%)	1,238,854 (33.3)	1,139,309 (30.6)	639,412 (17.2)	230,087 (6.2)	327,951 (8.8)	77,604 (2.1)	53,378 (1.4)	12,053 (0.3)	3,718,748

**Table 3: Analysis of use of Medicare mental health items under Better Access program, by age and sex
Calendar year 2008**

Medicare service	Age groups									
	0-4	5-14	15-24	25-34	35-44	45-54	55-64	65-74	75-84	85+
GP m h plans & review (F) (% 2007)	1,356 (+59.7)	19,649 (+47.5)	78,249 (+29.6)	106,294 (+24.8)	113,614 (+26.4)	87,710 (+26.3)	51,562 (+29.6)	18,725 (+30.1)	7,363 (+28.6)	1,374 (+17.8)
Plan/review	10.2	4.8	3.5	2.9	2.6	2.5	2.4	2.3	2.5	2.0
GP m h plans & review (M) (% 2007)	2,589 (+62.4)	25,079 (+49.4)	37,417 (+35.1)	54,249 (+27.6)	58,866 (+27.0)	45,196 (+27.0)	26,261 (+31.0)	8,792 (+28.8)	3,518 (+29.0)	397 (+18.1)
Plan/review	7.8	4.8	4.3	3.4	3.0	2.8	2.5	2.5	2.4	2.7
GP mh consult (F) (%2007)	211 (+104.8)	4,388 (+51.6)	54,983 (+46.5)	80,500 (+44.7)	96,443 (+49.0)	82,726 (+50.7)	51,983 (+55.9)	24,160 (+62.6)	11,308 (+57.6)	2,347 (+70.9)
GP mh consult (M) (%2007)	291 (+91.4)	4,403 (+70.9)	26,072 (+48.2)	46,877 (+42.3)	54,284 (+42.3)	43,602 (+44.8)	27,775 (+53.6)	11,305 (+60.6)	5,028 (+60.6)	676 (+75.6)

	Age groups									
Medicare service	0-4	5-14	15-24	25-34	35-44	45-54	55-64	65-74	75-84	85+
GP psych strategies (F) (%2007)	6 (-25.0)	249 (+10.2)	2,782 (+1.1)	4,813 (+7.3)	5,527 (-2.3)	4,790 (-5.4)	3,476 (+6.5)	1,445 (+12.2)	639 (+3.9)	110 (+120)
GP psych strategies (M) (%2007)	6 (-60.0)	180 (-6.2)	1,282 (-9.7)	2,708 (-0.6)	3,228 (-1.5)	2,485 (+1.7)	1,716 (+6.0)	653 (+6.2)	314 (+7.2)	39 (-7.0)
Clin Psych services (F) (%2007)	1,698 (+87.6)	25,530 (+70.7)	78,191 (+60.3)	119,663 (+59.8)	124,861 (+60.2)	95,042 (+63.0)	52,237 (+64.2)	14,438 (+67.1)	3,920 (+64.0)	546 (+73.9)
Clin Psych services (M) (%2007)	3,295 (+69.3)	38,821 (+76.3)	36,343 (+70.1)	52,842 (+77.0)	59,859 (+68.9)	46,869 (+68.7)	26,847 (+77.9)	6,662 (+77.9)	1,927 (+69.8)	168 (+110.0)
Gen Psych services (F) (%2007)	2,295 (+63.6)	44,409 (+67.3)	127,309 (+41.4)	203,057 (+39.3)	234,271 (+45.4)	180,340 (+43.8)	100,989 (+45.5)	29,398 (+46.2)	8,675 (+43.6)	1,453 (+101.8)
Gen Psych services (M) (%2007)	4,511 (+73.0)	63,185 (+59.7)	57,557 (+52.0)	86,327 (+43.1)	106,208 (+47.1)	83,878 (+44.7)	48,628 (+52.1)	12,596 (+47.0)	3,668 (+46.2)	522 (+157.1)

	Age groups										
Medicare service	0-4	5-14	15-24	25-34	35-44	45-54	55-64	65-74	75-84	85+	
Occ Ther (F) (%2007)	554 (+282.0)	1,536 (+254.7)	1,368 (+93.2)	1,743 (+97.4)	2,130 (+92.1)	1,845 (+93.6)	815 (+83.6)	269 (+60.1)	106 (+60.6)	15 (+50.0)	
Occ Ther (M) (%2007)	2,641 (+217.4)	5,087 (+178.6)	597 (+91.3)	525 (+96.6)	695 (+55.8)	561 (+48.1)	293 (+42.2)	82 (+20.6)	51 (+88.9)	4 (+400.0)	
Soc wkr (F) (% 2007)	127 (+4.1)	2,487 (+52.9)	9,590 (+119.2)	16,088 (+108.8)	19,959 (+102.8)	14,215 (+108.2)	7,746 (+121.7)	2,194 (+121.3)	804 (+86.1)	173 (+56.6)	
Soc wkr (M) (%2007)	147 (-3.3)	2,701 (+87.3)	3,354 (+96.2)	5,397 (+127.8)	7,094 (+123.7)	6,273 (+156.4)	2,779 (+127.4)	867 (+166.8)	1,177 (+914.6)	23 (+155.5)	
Total services (F)	6,247	117,897	352,472	532,158	596,805	466,668	268,808	90,629	32,815	6,018	
Total services (M)	13,480	138,955	162,622	248,925	290,234	228,864	134,299	40,957	15,683	1,829	
Total M+F	19,607	256,852	515,094	781,083	887,039	695,532	403,107	131,586	48,498	7,847	
% of population	19.4%		42.8%			24.5%		13.1%			(1.6%)
% of total services	7.4%		58.7%			29.5%		5.1%			(0.2%)

PROVISO

This paper is the sole work of the author who takes full responsibility for all analyses, statements and any errors.