

SECTION 2 – Project Information

Project Title: Optimising Allied Health Psychological Treatments in Primary Health Care; piloting a randomised controlled trial of social worker training in focussed psychological strategies. (*SW-fps*)

Project Synopsis

Please provide a synopsis of your proposal that can be used for promotional purposes (eg. APHCRI website). Your synopsis should not exceed more than a couple of paragraphs.

Mental health problems are common and disabling and in many instances are complicated by a range of life stresses such as financial, employment or housing issues. (1) This is especially the case for vulnerable populations such as lower socio-economic or marginalised groups who could potentially benefit from the skills that social workers can offer, in addition to traditional psychological treatments. Over the last 8 years, mental health reforms in Australia, such as the *Better Outcomes* and *Better Access* programs, have greatly increased community access to the psychological treatments which have been delivered for the most part by psychologists (2,3,4,5). More recently social workers are beginning to utilise the Medicare incentives to provide focussed psychological services to patients referred from general practice.

In this context, it was notable that a key finding of our 2007 APCHRI funded stream 6 review "Optimising the Primary Mental Health Care Workforce" was the *lack of studies demonstrating the effectiveness of non psychologist allied health delivered psychological treatments* (6). Based on this, two of our key policy options were 1) fund targeted training of allied health providers, such as social workers, to provide; focussed psychological treatments, problem solving and to work with primary care populations and 2) to undertake effectiveness studies of non psychologist allied health providers (6).

So we propose as the next step for our stream 12 proposal to evaluate the impact of the training of social workers in focussed psychological strategies (7) on their skills and ability to work in primary care settings. We propose a randomised controlled study to measure the impact of training intervention for social workers (which is called "SW- fps") which will be adapted from an existing focussed psychological strategies training model used in general practice (7). Our primary measure will be the development of skills in cognitive behavioural strategies (8) and secondary measures will be other social work specific psychological techniques such as eco-mapping (9) and level of integration within primary care. The primary outcome will be measured using videotaping standardised simulated consultations before and after training and rating them using standardised scales, an approach we have successfully used in evaluating GP training in focussed psychological strategies (10)