

### **Comment by APS CEO Dr Zena Burgess:**

*The APS believes that AI presents potential benefits for humanity, including improved health outcomes, but that safeguarding mechanisms must keep up with AI advancements to keep individuals and society safe. Harnessing technology is promising for the psychology profession however AI regulation is vital to ensure client safety. Amidst this new frontier, embracing artificial intelligence is not about replacing psychologists, but helping them enhance their capabilities and improving efficiencies.*

*While AI can also act as a valuable preparatory/education tool, let's remember that AI interventions are meant to complement, not replace, the vital human interactions that define the psychology profession.*

*Generative AI offers the psychology profession a multitude of opportunities, some of which remain unknown. Importantly, the implications of AI and the impact of its use on mental health and wellbeing we are yet to comprehend.*

*While the possibilities are exciting, we must tread carefully in the world of AI and psychology. It's not just about technological advancement – it's about ethics and responsibility. In our [response](#) to the Federal Government's Safe and Responsible AI in Australia discussion paper (Aug '23), we emphasised the need for AI regulation to ensure client safety.*

*Psychological therapy is relationship-based. Therapy occurs within the context of a real human relationship which evolves over time. Research shows that the quality of this relationship is one of the most powerful predictors of therapy success. And while some recent research has shown that people feel that therapy chatbots provide a similar feeling of relationship, ultimately it's not. We may be doing people a disservice by proliferating imitations of relationships, rather than the real thing.*

*We don't know how most AI therapy models are trained. Most likely they're not trained on Australian patients and their problems and needs. It is even less likely to have been tailored to the needs of people from different cultural groups and backgrounds, and First Nations people. The type of intervention that's provided can be completely inappropriate and harmful because of biases and gaps in the model.*

*A key issue in GenAI at the moment is about error identification and reporting. Anyone who has used ChatGPT or other technologies will know that quite often it will get things wrong. In most cases that's harmless, but getting things wrong in a therapy context can be very dangerous. A human psychologist has an ethical obligation to acknowledge the error and work through its implications for the therapy and relationship, which can usually be itself a therapeutic process. But we don't have any good assurance about how AI models will identify errors and learn from errors, or if they'll just continue to provide inaccurate or dangerous information. AI-powered 'therapy bots' might act as a*

*24/7 'triage' service for those seeking immediate mental health assistance but they do not replace professional support.*

*The idea is that the technology offers basic in-the-moment assistance – but then refers the user to a professional human expert. In times of distress, we urge patients to continue to use psychologists and to consider AI as a potential supplementary tool e.g. to provide information or relaxation exercises while waiting for an initial psychologist appointment.*

*We advocate for AI developers and government to work with the APS is developing appropriate safety guidelines. The APS has called for further investment and research to understand the full psychological impacts of AI use. This includes but goes beyond mental health, as the use of AI can change fundamental human experiences in relation to relationships, decision-making, autonomy and so on. We're also keen to see the government invest in psychologist-led research projects to understand the impacts of AI use by Australian young people. Governments must engage with the community to increase technological literacy and awareness about the harms and benefits while also increasing research into the psychological implications.*

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