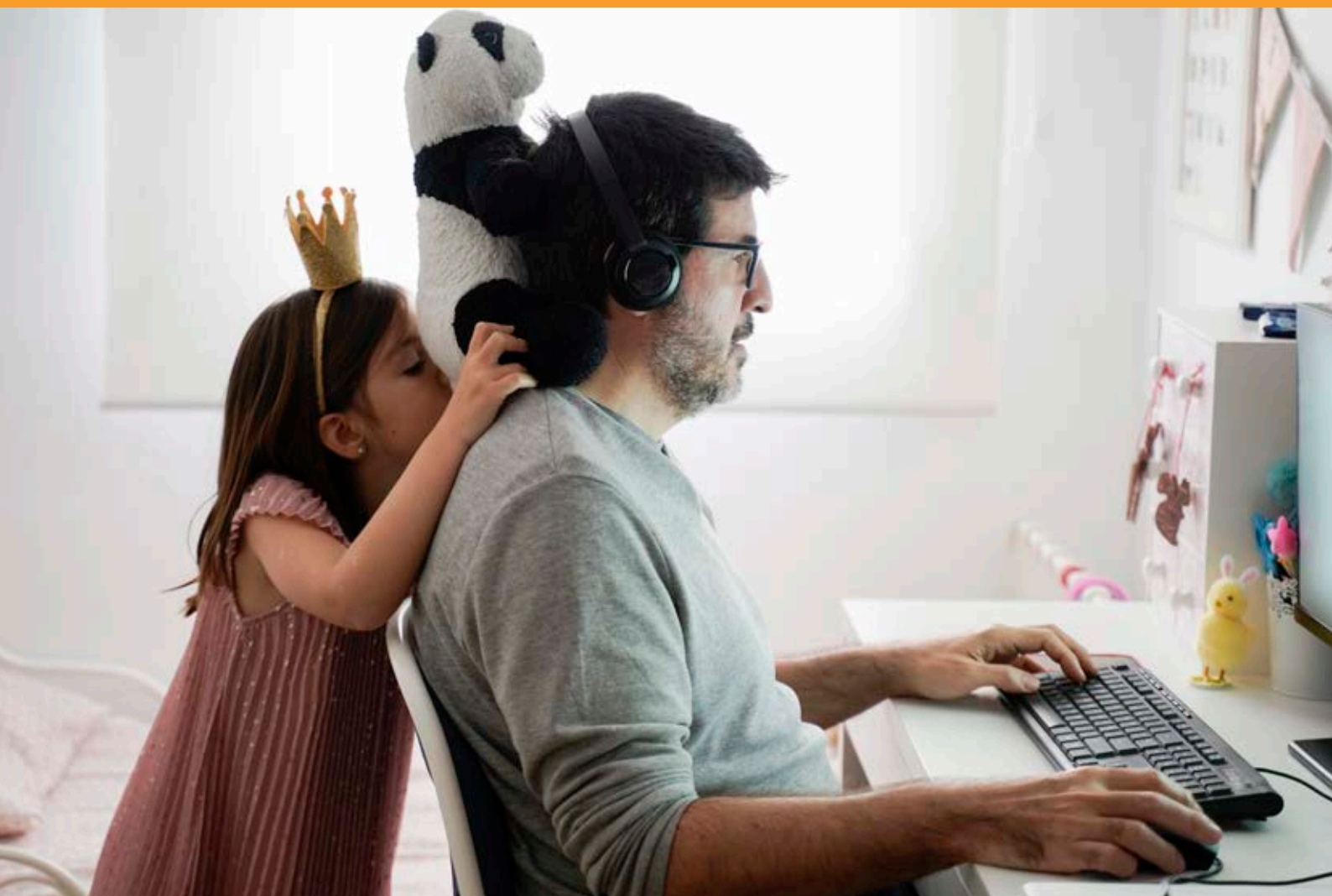




AUSTRALIAN
PHYSIOTHERAPY
ASSOCIATION

2020: A YEAR TO REMEMBER IN ADVOCACY

Australian Physiotherapy Association



COVID-19 may have put many areas of life on hold this year, but the APA's advocacy has never been busier or more successful.

This year, we secured changes that we have long lobbied for – including public and private telehealth funding, the appointment of a national Chief Allied Health Officer, increased fees in compensable schemes, a partnership approach with private health insurers and a doubling of consultations under the Medicare Benefits Schedule (MBS) in aged care.

We have acted quickly in a rapidly changing COVID environment on behalf of members and consumers, including lobbying for an extension of JobKeeper payments; securing PPE from the national medical stockpile and liaising with national and state departments to keep you up to date and to answer your questions.

While the pandemic was a key focus, we ensured physiotherapy continued to be heard in other vital areas of health reform. Most notable of these is National President Phil Calvert's work on the 10-year Primary Health Care Reform and National Preventative Health Strategy steering committees. Physiotherapy is the only individual allied health profession represented in these pivotal forums.

We also continued to advance the profession in pain, women's health, disability and other sectors. It has been a year of agility, embracing innovation and technology and supporting our membership every step of the way.

We look back at the advocacy highlights of 2020 with thanks to the many members who generously contributed their time and expertise during an already difficult year.

Your contributions truly are noticed by decision makers. For example this year we twice received thanks from the Aged Care Royal Commission for our comprehensive COVID-19 submission based on your survey feedback. They noted that your comments were powerful and persuasive. Well-deserved high praise for hardworking physiotherapists.

We bid a fond farewell to our outgoing National Group Chairs with gratitude for your tireless efforts.

And welcome our newly appointed Chairs and Board members.

This is our last Advocacy News for 2020. The newsletter will resume in February and keep you up to date on how we are progressing in delivering our Advocacy Strategy.

We look forward to working with you all to further advance the profession in 2021.



Anja Nikolic
CEO

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander health

Our goals

To stay connected with our Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander physiotherapy community and key stakeholders to promote partnerships and cultural awareness.

Our actions

Our Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Health Committee:

- hosted virtual yarning sessions for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander physiotherapists and students
- hosted a webinar to answer questions about reconciliation to mark National Reconciliation Week
- is developing a series of strategies to enhance partnerships, engagement, and promote cultural safety. APA is rolling out a comprehensive communications plan in 2021.

The APA is a member of the Close the Gap Steering Committee, a collaboration of peak Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander and non-Indigenous health bodies working together to achieve equality in health and life expectancy for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples.

Results

We are prepared to begin work in 2021 on a cultural safety framework to embed cultural safety through every level of the profession and build on our reconciliation efforts.



Aged Care

Our goals

We support:

- the proposed AN-ACC funding model and are calling for an additional layer of restorative and reablement funding to align with it,
- additional MBS funding to enhance the quality of life of older people, and
- measures to address the impact of COVID-19 restrictions on the mobility and health of older people.

Our actions

Fifteen years of raising awareness about the value of physiotherapy for all older people, across an often complex ageing continuum, and the need for physio-led restorative and reablement care for older Australians has reaped results.

This year, the APA has:

- contributed to joint work with AHPA, the draft Dementia, Ageing and Aged Care Roadmap, and a number of working groups including on mental health with the Australian Psychological Society,
- made a submission to the Draft Restraint Principles Review,
- met with the Minister for Aged Care Richard Colbeck twice,
- made five submissions to the Royal Commission into Aged Care Quality and Safety, and
- lobbied hard to secure APA a seat in the Royal Commission virtual “witness box”.

Results

- Board Director Rik Dawson presented compelling testimony about the impact of lockdowns on mobility to the Investigation into the Impact of COVID-19 on Aged Care. That testimony contributed to Royal Commission recommendations for MBS funding for allied health and the introduction of rehabilitation and mobility programs.
- Physiotherapy consultations under Chronic Disease Management Plans have been temporarily doubled.
- In a major step forward and possibly presenting an ongoing opportunity, group therapy is also being funded for physiotherapy, OTs and EPs.
- We are hearing our language reflected back by key stakeholders and believe the importance of physiotherapy is being recognised.
- Aged care is an APA priority focus area in 2021.



Chief Allied Health Officer

Our goals

The appointment of a Federal Chief Allied Health Officer to:

- provide a centralised point of contact for urgent advice to ensure safe and compliant practice by allied health providers,
- bring deep understanding of the allied health sector to government and ensure all essential services in the primary health care sector are considered in decision making,
- promote the role of allied health in all settings, including ICU and pandemic response,
- lead, coordinate and integrate a consistent approach among states and territories and
- connect allied health and all jurisdictions to the Primary Health Care Network.

Our actions

We have long advocated – along with AHPA and others - for the appointment at departmental and Ministerial levels. This year we advocated via our submissions to the Aged Care Royal Commission and Senate inquiries into the impact of COVID-19 and directly to MPs.

Results

Chief Allied Health Officer, physiotherapist Dr Anne-marie Boxhall, was appointed. We have since met with Dr Boxhall a number of times.

Compensables

Our goals

We asked a number of state schemes to address archaic long-standing barriers to quality care.

Our actions

We held extensive negotiations with compensable schemes. In SA, we undertook 12 years of consistent lobbying for a fair fee for treating injured workers.

APA QLD advocated to the Motor Accident and Insurance Commission (MAIC) about compulsory third party (CTP) insurer RACQ instilling capped fees to our members treating patients covered under their scheme. These capped fees in many instances fell well below the prescribed cost for such treatment. This was then further exacerbated by RACQ's insistence that where a treatment or appointment cost exceeded this cap that any additional costs must be absorbed either by patients or the physiotherapist concerned.

Results

- In NSW, SIRA enabled physiotherapists to write certificates of capacity to their patients.
- In SA, RTWSA increased the fee paid to physiotherapists for a standard consultation. In addition to the standard indexation of all physiotherapy services by 1.6%, the fee for standard consultation has increased further from \$68.00 to \$78.50. This agreed increase will amount to about \$3 million in additional payments to physiotherapists across the state for treating injured workers each year.
- In QLD, RACQ discontinued their approach and followed that taken by all other CTP insurers with respect to funding CTP claimant costs.

COVID-19

Our goals

Physiotherapists to be enabled to continue providing care to consumers safely and with minimal barriers.
Physiotherapists to understand all COVID-19 rules to ensure safety and compliance.

Our actions

The APA advocated at national and state levels on behalf of the profession on an almost daily basis. We secured the release of 500,000 masks for allied health via PHNs following strong advocacy from the APA and AHPA. The APA had been in direct contact with the Minister for Health's office and drafted the strategy used by AHPA in its advocacy to the Department.

We supported our members during 2020 with:

- Daily COVID-19 updates,
- up-to-date FAQs providing information on issues and questions relating to physiotherapy and COVID-19,
- resources from our partners, such as HR in practice, Williams Buck and HESTA, to assist in business continuity,
- free access to Business pages for all members, and
- speedy and accurate responses to member inquiries.

Results

Physiotherapy was declared an essential service and physiotherapists were able to continue providing service via telehealth or face-to-face where appropriate throughout most COVID-19 lockdown areas. Members were able to access up-to-date information about the pandemic impacts; secure PPE and access clinical and business resources for free.



Digital research

Our goals

Ongoing funding for telehealth and further evidence of physiotherapy's efficacy to underpin our advocacy.

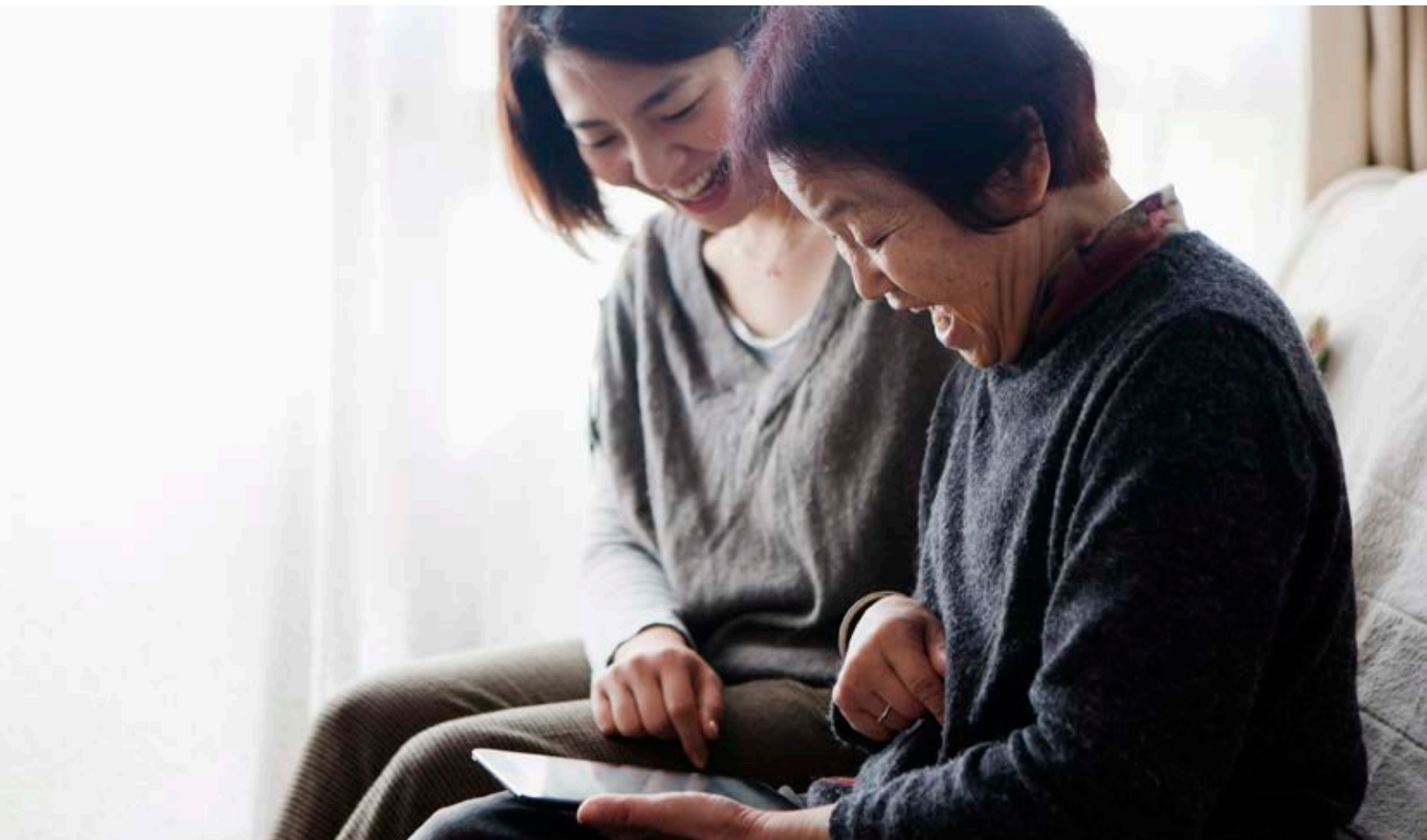
Our actions

The Physiotherapy Research Foundation (PRF) funded two initiatives to strengthen our advocacy and deliver real time, powerful data-driven arguments to decision makers. The projects are:

- telehealth by physiotherapists in Australia during the COVID-19 pandemic and
- Patient-Reported Outcome Measures (PROMs) data pilot.

Results

The PRF telehealth research has shown consumers will embrace a hybrid service delivery model that includes telehealth and that they feel safe and secure using telehealth. Our Outcome Measures data pilot is ongoing.



Disability

Our goals

Ongoing awareness of the role physiotherapists play in supporting people living with disability.

Our actions

The APA:

- Held ongoing discussions with senior NDIA officials about the scope and timelines of the Independent Assessor program, due for roll-out in October, confirming that the second pilot is behind schedule and timelines for national roll-out have been extended to February 2021. Our discussions are also addressing concerns raised by members including the appropriateness of assessment tools, selection of tools and the role of Independent Assessors in plan development and review. We are working closely with other relevant allied health associations and are encouraged by the productive and ongoing consultation with the NDIA to date.
- The APA received funding from the Department of Social Services to develop the 'Build Your Confidence in Disability management' online course. The course is designed to upskill physiotherapists to increase their confidence in working with people with a disability.
- We met with Minister for NDIS Stuart Robert to maintain ongoing discussions about how physiotherapy can support NDIS participants.
- Provided submissions on:
 - NDIS Annual Pricing Review
 - Victorian Disability Worker Regulation Scheme
 - Joint Standing Committee on the NDIS – NDIS workforce
 - Royal Commission into Disability – Emergency Planning and response
 - Joint Standing Committee on NDIS Quality and Safeguards Commission
 - NDIA research and evaluation
 - Inquiry into QLD NDIS market
 - NDIS support coordinators
 - National NDIS workforce plan
 - National Disability Strategy

Results

We maintain ongoing dialogue with the NDIS. The Build Your Confidence in Disability management course, a mix of lectures, case study videos and interactive eLearning, will be available in 2021. Physiotherapy has had a strong voice in the sector.



Economic value of physiotherapy report

Our goals

An independent cost benefits analysis of the economic benefit of physiotherapy to take to decision makers and underpin our advocacy.

Our actions

The APA commissioned and worked closely with economics consultancy Nous Group to undertake detailed costs benefits analysis in key areas of physiotherapy practice.

Results

The APA will be launching this impressive work accompanied by powerful infographics in 2021.

Increased representation and collaboration

Our goals

Opportunities to build new relationships and extend our influence and reach.

Our actions

The APA:

- became a member of the Consumer Health Forum,
- created a partnership with the Australasian Birth Trauma Association,
- strengthened our relationship with Primary Health Networks to ensure physiotherapists could access PPE,
- worked closely with state Chief Allied Health Officers and health departments across the country,
- joined the National COVID-19 Clinical Evidence Taskforce, a collaboration of peak health professional bodies across Australia whose members are providing clinical care to people with COVID-19 and
- participated in vital health reform through National President Phil Calvert's work as a member of the 10-year Primary Health Care Reform and National Preventative Health Strategy steering committees.

Results

We have key opportunities to shape the future of primary health care, advocate for the value of physiotherapy in COVID rehabilitation and align with key stakeholders to prosecute our advocacy platforms.

National Injury Prevention

Our goals

Greater mobilisation of programs to support Australians at higher risk of injury, including workers and aged care residents.

Our actions

We responded to the Federal Government's call for comment on the National Injury Prevention Strategy and voiced our support for targeted strategies for priority populations, including Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples, rural and remote Australians, those living with disabilities and socio-economically disadvantaged populations.

Results

We have begun an ongoing dialogue in this space and will continue to address this in 2021.



Pain

Our goals

The APA have advocated strongly for physiotherapy to be included, both at the strategic level and on the ground, in the roll-out of the National Pain Strategy, and for the vital role physiotherapy plays in the management of persistent pain.

Our actions

Reached out to the pain network and secured a place for APA on a consortium for a grant application to develop national education in pain management, to align with the National Strategic Action Plan for Pain Management.

Results

The APA is represented on two important committees; Pain Australia's Communication and Awareness Reference Group and an External Advisory Panel to steer a four-year project with a consortium of pain educators from across the country. The grant application was successful and APA's role will include the use of (and recognition of) APA Titled Pain Physiotherapists in the expansion of Pain Revolution's local network program, and to train more on the ground clinicians in a train-the-trainer program.



Rural and regional health

Our goals

Improved access to physiotherapy in rural, regional and remote areas and incentivising physiotherapy workforce retention in these areas.

Our actions

The APA:

- became a member of Services for Australian Rural and Remote Allied Health (SARRAH),
- collaborated with the National Rural Health Alliance on a number of topics and
- met with Minister for Regional Health Mark Coulton and new National Rural Health Commissioner Ruth Stewart. Commissioner Stewart confirmed:
 - Department of Health is recruiting for a Deputy National Rural Health Commissioner who is an allied health professional of Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander background, and
 - her support of multidisciplinary primary care.

Results

We are well placed to influence the national rural health agenda in 2021. We will ensure a strong rural focus remains on advancing physiotherapy through models of care to improve service access and support practice viability.



Safe return to sport

Our goals

An opportunity to raise awareness of the importance of physiotherapy in preventing injury upon returning to sport after a long lay-off.

Our actions

The APA worked with Minister for Sport Richard Colbeck and our Sports National Advisory Committee on a joint sport injury prevention campaign. We produced a suite of videos featuring club physiotherapists with Australian Opals and Sydney Kings basketballers, and the Australian Diamonds Netball team.

Results

The Minister was interviewed by media about the importance of safe returns to sport and the videos were viewed more than 100,000 times.



Telehealth

Our goals

Telehealth item numbers to be allocated across all funders permanently.

Our actions

The APA:

- lobbied for this for years. COVID-19 gave us the opportunity to fast track our advocacy to address the needs of clients during the pandemic,
- held extensive discussions with the Department of Health, private health insurers and compensable schemes,
- developed Telehealth guidelines, a comprehensive document that clearly outlines how telehealth should be conducted by practitioners,
- assisted members adapt to telehealth provision quickly during COVID-19 with online resources including videos and
- hosted multiple telehealth round table discussions with a wide range of stakeholders. Attendees included Allied Health Professions Australia, Melbourne, Flinders and Queensland Universities, Consumer Health Forum Australia, HCF, Victoria's Transport Accident Commission, National Disability Insurance Scheme, National Rural Health Alliance, Motor Accident Insurance Commission, Services for Australian Rural and Remote Allied Health, Digital Health and the Physio Co.

Results

Telehealth was temporarily introduced by all funders during COVID-19 and we successfully advocated for an extension of MBS and DVA funding beyond the original September 2020 end date. The Minister for Health and some private insurers have indicated telehealth will be permanently funded.



Veterans

Our goals

In a year when most of the Department of Veteran's Affairs reform initiatives were placed on hold, our goals have been to continue to build a strong relationship with the Department and Minister's Office and ensure the APA is consulted when programs resume – particularly the Treatment Cycle Initiative Review and funding model reform. We focused on ensuring telehealth funding be made available to practitioners and promoting the value of physiotherapy in treating veterans.

Our actions

We have been in regular contact with the Department and the Minister's Office.

The APA is on the steering committee of the University of Queensland DVA-funded Active Choices research program. The program has been extended until December 2021.

We showcased the important relationship between physiotherapists and veterans – and the difference physiotherapy makes to veterans' lives – with a series of social media case studies.

Results

We are working with the Department and our members to provide feedback to the Treatment Cycle review and be prepared for the funding model trial in 2021.

The Minister for Veteran's Affairs wrote to the APA advising on plans to progress reform work. Twenty-seven physiotherapists have signed up to participate in the Active Choices research.

Our case studies attracted high engagement, including being brought to the attention of the Minister.



Women's health

Our goals

Improved access to pelvic health physiotherapy for all women in perinatal years.

Our actions

Chair of the APA Women's Men's & Pelvic Health group Cath Willis and Amy Dawes, CEO of the Australasian Birth Trauma Association, met with Dr Fiona Martin MP to discuss improving access to pelvic health physiotherapy for all women in the perinatal years.

Dr Martin took the message to Health Minister Greg Hunt and spoke on the topic in Federal Parliament.

APA Women's and Men's Health Group contributed to the development of the new Australian Commission on Quality and Safety in Health Care (ACQSHC) Clinical Care Standard on Third and Fourth Degree Perineal Tears. This standard has been officially endorsed by the APA and will be launched in early 2021.

Results

- Increased awareness of the issues at a political and community level.
- The ACQSHC Clinical Care Standard on Third and Fourth Degree Perineal Tears has been officially endorsed by the APA and will be launched in early 2021.
- Women's Health is an APA priority area in 2021.





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