

Physiotherapy in Veterans' Care

New data highlights urgent need for better physiotherapy funding for veterans



Data gathered in December 2025 by the Australian Physiotherapy Association (APA) shows the critical impact of insufficient funding on veterans' access to physiotherapy care. The Department of Veterans Affairs must take immediate action to enhance healthcare services for Australia's veterans.

The policy problem unpacked



1 | Essential care neglected

Physiotherapy is vital for veterans' rehabilitation and wellbeing, but remains critically underfunded, impacting access for veterans.

2 | Unviable care model

The Department of Veterans Affairs (DVA) model is unviable for physiotherapists, with fee discrepancies exacerbating barriers to essential care.



3 | Missed opportunities

Consecutive budgets have failed to address the essential healthcare needs of veterans, particularly in relation to physiotherapy.

1 | LEAVING PHYSIOTHERAPY BEHIND LEAVES VETERANS BEHIND

The **Royal Commission into Defence and Veteran Suicide** highlighted the critical link between physical health and mental wellbeing. Improving the physical health of veterans can contribute to improving their mental wellbeing.



CHRONIC PAIN: A key risk factor for mental ill-health in defence and veterans.

88% of veterans who have transitioned from active service experience some level of pain.

31.7% of ex-serving veterans reported pain that was either high-intensity or disabling.



The most common physical injury in veterans is **musculoskeletal**, accounting for **58.6% of injuries**.

2 | DVA FEES CHALLENGE THE SUSTAINABILITY OF PHYSIOTHERAPY SERVICES FOR VETERANS

DVA services are not viable

The APA's December 2025 data shows year on year impacts to the delivery of physiotherapy to veterans is worsening.

92% of physiotherapists believe that the current funding provided by the DVA is insufficient to sustain viable healthcare services for veterans.

Independent analysis undertaken by the Nous Group found an **appropriate hourly rate** for the provision of physiotherapy services to be **\$261**.¹

66% of respondents were required to make changes to DVA services, such as reducing appointments offered or referring to junior colleagues, in order to continue treating DVA patients..



Year on year physiotherapists report that they will have to stop providing this care if funding does not increase.

In 2024, **68%** stated they will have to stop or limit services to veterans

The latest data showed exits through 2025 were **60%**

The majority have been struggling to sustain service for veterans under DVA's funding model for a number of years.

Veterans are suffering because they cannot access the critical physiotherapy treatment they need.

Of those who continued to provide DVA services, **53%** had to limit services.

Without reform, up to **53%** of physios could leave DVA in 2026.

3 | GOVERNMENT HAS FAILED TO ADDRESS THE ESSENTIAL HEALTHCARE NEEDS OF VETERANS

Physiotherapists are passionate about veterans' health



Chronic pain is a significant and growing issue among veterans, affecting 27–57% during their service and return to normal life.²

The burden of chronic pain is more burdensome compared to the general population, contributing to various challenges such as depression, anxiety, sleep disturbance, and substance use disorder.³



Physiotherapists are committed to delivering this vital care, but this currently relies on them providing unsustainable services out of genuine concern for veterans.

CASE STUDY:

Physiotherapy keeps veterans with knee osteoarthritis moving

An international study of veterans with knee osteoarthritis evidences⁴



Up to **30%** improvement in physical function.



20–25% reduction in knee pain.



Physiotherapy can delay or avoid the need for knee replacement surgery.

The significant shortfall for physiotherapists reflects the government's undervaluation of quality healthcare for veterans.

9 in 10

physiotherapists expressed doubts about the government's seriousness in this area.

80%

of physiotherapists feel that the government does not support the role of physiotherapy in veterans' health care.

Physiotherapists are essential to this care, yet they are funded **\$55 less per service** than other allied health clinicians such as occupational therapists.

SOLUTION: THE DVA PRICING FRAMEWORK NEEDS SERIOUS REFORM NOW AND FOR THE LONG-TERM

The [Royal Commission](#) found that DVA fees are out of step with the real cost of delivering safe, quality-assured care – driving provider withdrawal, constraining access and undermining the system veterans rely on.

The APA calls for an immediate increase to **DVA physiotherapy fees** to align with real market conditions.

This is essential to:

- Reflect the true cost of delivering safe, high-quality care
- Stabilise provider viability and workforce participation
- Remove a structural barrier to timely access
- Deliver on Recommendation 71 by addressing a known access constraint



Sources:

¹ NOUS report: Hourly rate for the provision of physiotherapy services (2025), Australian Physiotherapy Association

² BehaviourWorks Australia (2022) 'Association between chronic pain, suicidal thoughts and behaviour in military and veteran populations'.

³ Royal Commission into Defence and Veteran Suicide (2024) Final Report, Commonwealth of Australia.

⁴ Allen KD, Oddone EZ, Coffman CJ, et al. Implementation of a group physical therapy program for veterans with knee osteoarthritis. BMC Musculoskeletal Disorders. 2020;21:1–10.