



AUSTRALIAN
PHYSIOTHERAPY
ASSOCIATION

APA ADVOCACY NEWS

2021: the year ahead



2021: The year ahead in advocacy

There's a balloon that is being marketed, presumably for children, with the slogan "Covid-19 ruined my party".

The global pandemic is far from humorous, yet this slogan captures the mood. Covid-19 has re-set our social and working lives. It also means the 'normal' ways governments operate, and the way associations like the APA advocate, lobby and interact with decision makers, have changed.

The APA Policy and Government Relations Team has set goals and agendas for 2021, however, as we know, this novel coronavirus has no regard for the best laid plans. We cannot travel interstate with certainty, lock in times for launches and events, or even sit down to talk with politicians.

Instead of face-to-face meetings, our strategy is for on-line engagement with our key stakeholders and Members of Parliament. This is the new advocacy 'normal'.

There are set agendas that are reflected in the APA Policy and Advocacy Strategy 2020-23. This is our four-pillar approach, targeting access, scope, funding and workforce.

We will continue targeted communications and engagement on COVID-19, and showcase the skills and leadership of physiotherapists during the pandemic.



The Royal Commission into Aged Care recommended addressing the impacts of the virus and lockdown. Funding for group programs to be distributed via PHNs in outbreak areas has been announced, and the APA is currently engaging with Primary Health Networks (PHNs) to advocate for physiotherapy-led models of care.

PHNs will be another area of concerted advocacy. The National President, Scott Willis, and CEO Anja Nikolic have written to all 31 PHNs to arrange a briefing where we can present the findings of the *Value of Physiotherapy in Australia* report, raise awareness of scope of practice and work with PHNs to ensure a stronger focus on physiotherapy-led solutions. This is a long-term agenda.

So too is reform to Primary Care. Integrating physiotherapy into Primary Health Care is our goal, however we know this means addressing the structural barriers and entrenched systems – systems that do not necessarily deliver the best outcome for patients, or the best use of health resources.

In short, we will advocate for an expanded role while also protecting the economic viability of physiotherapists.

There's ongoing advocacy around Private Health Insurance (PHI), notably improving access and choice for consumers, and exploring opportunities to partner to improve access and choice for consumers.



Another area the Policy Team is very committed to is Women's Health. We want a new MBS Item for birth trauma, in-hospital early diagnosis, access to referrals, and more funding for treatment.

There are, of course, many other areas we will be pursuing and advocating on. With an election possible in late 2021, we will likely prioritise our 'asks' in light of the health policies and issues that will arise during a campaign.

In the meantime, the APA will work to meet with the relevant Ministers, Shadow Ministers and minor party spokespeople, as well as those MPs with an expressed interest in sport and exercise, women's health, preventive health, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander health, rural and remote health, disability and the NDIS.

We'll also engage with relevant Parliamentary Friends groups and caucus committees, championing the *Value of Physiotherapy in Australia* report, our Pre-Budget submission and the APA's representation on the Preventive Health Taskforce and Primary Care Steering Committee.



What we are aiming for: 2021 and beyond

New models of care: First Contact Physiotherapy in Primary Care

Support innovative models of care, including reform of primary care that allows patient access to physiotherapy as first contact practitioners.

Funded trials of the UK's First Contact Physio model.

Support MBS Review's Recommendations on allied health to deliver evidence-based savings and efficiencies into primary care.

Preventive health: accelerated establishment of new preventive health models

Invest (through PHNs) in multidisciplinary models that promote allied health and physiotherapists working with GPs in primary care settings.

Aged care: re-orient aged care services towards an aged care model focused on reablement, preventive and restorative care

Fund Medicare-subsidised access to physiotherapy towards a preventive, reablement, and restorative care approach.

Implement the Royal Commission into Aged Care Quality and Safety recommendations (final report).

Fund a physiotherapy-led falls prevention program in RACFs to improve quality of life, physical function and falls reduction.



Mental health: formalise the role of physiotherapy in mental health care

Expand access to mental health care through a multidisciplinary approach that brings physiotherapy to the team.

Expand funding through Medicare access to private physiotherapy – recognising the benefit of physiotherapy-led interventions in chronic pain and physical ill-health.

Women’s health: birth trauma - remove cost barriers to appropriate diagnostic tools and ante-and pre-natal care

Fund Medicare-subsidised access to physiotherapy assessment and management via GP referral for all Australian women during pregnancy and up to one year postpartum. That is, one session antenatal, five sessions postnatal and a further five physio sessions where needed.

Rural health: new physiotherapy-led models of primary care to address rural workforce shortages

Invest in integrated care models and incentivised team-based care arrangements. Refine the PHN commissioning approach to address allied health service delivery challenges in rural areas.

Increase rebated physiotherapy and allied health services to ensure comprehensive primary care for rural Australians.



Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander health: reduce barriers to accessing physiotherapy services

Trial the impact of embedding appropriately trained physiotherapists into Aboriginal Community Controlled Health Services (ACCHS).

Supporting programs and training initiatives to develop a culturally safe physiotherapy profession.

Research into physiotherapy service underutilisation for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people.

Workforce: expansion of nationally consistent allied health data collection

Establish a national minimum allied health data set to build a clearer picture of allied health services.

COVID 19: fund post-acute COVID-19 rehabilitation services

Prioritise a Medicare-subsidised physiotherapy rehabilitation pathway for intensive care patients after hospital.

Digital health: Address the barriers to reform to unlock our digital health potential

Support and incentivise physiotherapy-led digital projects that test value creating solutions to strengthen our digital health capabilities.

Fund a Practice Incentives Program – eHealth Incentive for physiotherapy and allied health similar to the ePiP for general practice.





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