



AUSTRALIAN  
PHYSIOTHERAPY  
ASSOCIATION

# APA ADVOCACY NEWS

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# Contents

Advancing aged care advocacy one step at a time .....	2
Compensable schemes .....	4
COVID advocacy .....	5
Dementia Action Week .....	7
Digital health .....	8
Disability .....	10
Government Relations .....	11
Mental health and suicide prevention .....	11
Primary Health Networks .....	12
Rural health .....	12
Veterans .....	13

# Advancing aged care advocacy one step at a time

Aged care is one of the APA's key policy priority areas and there has never been more reform on the agenda in the sector.

National Gerontology Chair Joanna Tan and the APA Policy team have started to build our advocacy campaign to maintain and improve access to physiotherapy care for older people in all settings. We have rolled out the first stage of our stakeholder engagement strategy, designed to increase recognition of the value of physiotherapy and lay a foundation for future alliances.

Our messages are clear:

- Access to physiotherapy is critical for older people in all settings.
- Restorative and reablement care is essential to independence and quality of life.
- There is clear evidence demonstrating physiotherapy's efficacy and cost benefits, including the APA's landmark *Economic Value of Physiotherapy in Australia* report.
- Physiotherapy's full scope of practice benefits physical and mental health.

Recently we have held preliminary meetings with politicians, and key industry, consumer and health peak bodies. APA National President Scott Willis briefed Acting Shadow Minister for Aged Care Ged Kearney and Chief Allied Health Officer Dr Anne-marie Boxall on our concerns about the new residential aged care funding model, the Australian National Aged Care Classification (AN-ACC) and also providing Shadow Health Minister, Mark Butler with briefing materials.

We have also discovered much alignment with the two largest peaks representing aged care facility providers - Leading Age Care Services Australia (LASA) and Aged and Community Services Australia (ACSA) and continue to build on our relationships with consumer groups, the Council on the Ageing, Older Person's Advocacy Network (OPAN) and the Consumer Health Forum. We are working on a number of collaborations including a webinar for LASA members on the value of physiotherapy; will present as part of OPAN's wellbeing webinar series for older consumers; and exploring collaborations with other organisations.

Importantly, we have also met with large allied health provider groups to understand how they think reforms will impact the physiotherapy workforce and to work with them on a joint approach to the Federal Government.

Dementia Australia and the APA are also collaborating on a joint position statement about the benefits of physiotherapy in dementia care and we are looking to partner with other key peaks on similar projects, including the Australian Association of Gerontology.

The APA is working across a number of areas to strengthen care for older people and ensure a sustainable physiotherapy workforce, including via our Primary Health Network Strategy and policy leadership in preventative health and primary health reforms.

There is a long road of campaigning ahead of us as the government plans and delivers its reform package with much of the detail unclear at this stage. Much of our current focus is on residential care as we await a schedule of work for reforms in home care setting.

There are many more doors to knock on, including those of the Independent Hospital Pricing Authority, Aged Care Advisory Council and the Council of Elders but with every door that opens comes new insights and opportunities to advance the profession and ensure older consumers receive high quality, evidence based care.

## How you can get involved

The Department of Health has launched its Ageing and Aged Care Engagement Hub to provide a central source of information about current aged care engagement activities. Register your interest and get participate in workshops, surveys and other consultations.

**Further details:** [Hub](#)

## APA Aged Care Advocacy

### MESSAGES

- Access to physiotherapy is critical for older people in all settings
- Restorative and reablement care is essential to independence and quality of life
- Economic value of physiotherapy
- Full scope of practice



#### Members

- Gerontology state and national groups
- Other relevant advisory groups, researchers, clinical experts

Clinical expertise

Keeping members informed



- Quality submissions and representation
- Informed strategy
- Professional experience



#### Political

- Government Opposition Greens Independents
- Parliamentary committees

Influence decision makers

Identify opportunities

Understand political landscape



- Questions in Parliament
- Policy change
- Legislative change



#### Sector reform

- Department of Health
- Chief Allied Health Officer
- Independent Hospital Pricing Authority
- Aged Care Advisory Council
- Aged Care Safety and Quality Authority
- Council of Elders

Physiotherapy representation

Scope of practice recognition

Cost benefit awareness



- Funding
- Workforce sustainability
- Increased access



#### Influential experts

- Academics
- Independent analysts

Gain support

Enhance reputation

Gather insights



- New research
- Realign APA position



#### Industry groups

- LASA
- ACSA
- Allied health providers
- NACA

Partnership and alliance

Promote physiotherapy

Increase awareness



- Industry webinars
- Industry publications
- Potential pilot programs
- Joint advocacy



#### Consumer groups

- COTA
- OPAN
- CHF

Partnership and alliance

Promote physiotherapy

Consumer perspective



- Consumer webinars
- Consumer research
- Joint advocacy



#### Health peaks

- AHPA
- AAG
- Dementia Australia
- Stroke Foundation
- Arthritis Australia

Partnership and alliance

Promote physiotherapy

Gather insights



- Joint position statements
- Access communications channels
- Joint advocacy



# Compensable schemes

## New South Wales

The APA has continued to advocate for the role that physiotherapists can play in recovery. There has been significant progress made in the creation of first-of-its kind definition for treatment of patients with complex conditions. NSW members contributed valuable and detailed feedback on the next iteration of the Allied Health Recovery Request form.

## Victoria

The APA has been involved with the development and roll-out of the first-of-its-kind peer-to-peer Clinical Hotline from WorkSafe Victoria (WSV). The Clinical Hotline is a telephone service for select treating health providers and agents.

The Clinical Hotline aims to support providers in their treatment of WorkCover patients and understand where broader education may be beneficial.

The link from WSV is now available and provides information on the hours of operation, and the topics the clinical panel can be contacted regards.

### [Further details: WorkSafe Victoria](#)

Physiotherapists can now submit payment request to WorkSafe online and in real time. WorkSafe is enabling requests for payment of services to injured workers to be submitted at the time and point of service. Invoices to WorkSafe can be submitted electronically for adjudication, receive quick real time feedback on services that need further review or cannot be paid and receive digital updates and remittance notifications as invoices are processed.

Worksafe has reported it will also be partnering with Medipass to deliver this option in late 2021, with HICAPS to follow in the second half of 2022. Providers already using HICAPS will continue to use the current claims process, until this enhancement is delivered.



# COVID advocacy

**We are working hard to ensure physiotherapy's status as an essential service is recognised, our members are kept up to date and the profession is included in relevant support packages.**

It has been a busy period of monitoring ever-changing rules and requirements and acting as a conduit of information between departments of health and our members.

Across the country, we have supported our dedicated members to lobby local MPs and Ministers. Their efforts strengthened the profession's voice during the crisis.

The APA is leading promising discussions with the Federal Chief Allied Health Officer (CAHO) to secure a single, consistent and universally accepted definition of essential work that includes the delivery of critical-care physiotherapy and physiotherapists as essential workers. We will drive for this definition to be accepted by all state/territory CAHOs as a consistent and predictable guideline for future lockdowns across the country.

It has been challenging in some jurisdictions but we are making progress.

## New South Wales

The APA met with Treasury and industry leaders to give input and provide a written submission on an economic and business Recovery Plan aligning with the Commonwealth Government's National Plan.

We have assisted NSW Health with requests to disperse information. Currently, NSW Health is hiring and training a range of allied health professionals and students to become vaccinators in vaccination centres across the state, and the mandating of vaccinations for healthcare workers.

**Further details:** [Vaccinator information](#), [Healthcare worker vaccinations](#)

## Northern Territory

We wrote to Minister for Health Natasha Fyles and liaised with the Chief Allied Health Officer pre-empting the need for clear rules about allied health and what are essential emergency physiotherapy services. As a result when the short lockdowns occurred in the NT all directions in relation to physiotherapy were clear and seamless.

## South Australia

We wrote to Minister for Health Stephen Wade and liaised with the Chief Allied Health Officer pre-empting the need for clear rules about allied health and what are essential emergency physiotherapy services.

Our advocacy has resulted in a significant revision of rules to allow private practice physiotherapists to treat complex urgent clients and conduct aged care home visits.

## Tasmania

We have been in regular communication with the State Government to ensure members are kept up to date and worked with the Chief Allied Health Officer on clarifying mandatory vaccination requirements.

**Further details:** [Coronavirus information](#)

## Victoria

We have written to Minister for Health Martin Foley calling for a change that would allow physiotherapists to use their clinical judgement to deliver face-to-face care for essential conditions (ie just below critical/urgent).

We also called on the Victorian Government to urgently reconsider their very limited easing of restrictions in private practice allied healthcare in regional areas. While hairdressing, beauty services and retail re-open, face-to-face physiotherapy care remains available only for 'essential' purposes. This represents only a modest increase in access compared to previous lockdown restrictions

The APA actioned a State Government request to share information that physiotherapists and physiotherapy students are among several new workforces recently authorised to prepare and/or administer the COVID-19 vaccine.

**Further details:** [APA metro media release](#), [APA regional media release](#), [COVID vaccination program workforce](#)

## Western Australia

Access to physiotherapy will be permitted for a number of patients under lockdown settings in specific circumstances:

- Essential Worker suffering from an acute condition that inhibits their ability to attend work as normal or complete the normal duties associated with their work.
- Post-surgical patient who has been discharged from hospital in the previous 3-4 days where lack of face-to-face treatment could result in
  - readmission to hospital
  - post-operative complications or
  - suffering from uncontrolled acute pain; as directed by the treating specialist medical practitioner.
- An individual with a disability who without treatment would require increase care needs or hospitalisation.
- Post-natal women suffering from a condition associated with breast feeding, that limits their ability to care for their child or may result in hospital presentation (eg. mastitis).

The Chief Allied Health Officer has advised that physios who work in any capacity at any of the following facilities, will be required to be fully vaccinated by the end of the year. The facilities include:

- a range of COVID clinics
- hospitals
- private practices located in the grounds of a private hospital
- public health service facility (this includes a health service provider; or the Department CEO; or a contracted health entity under a contract or other agreement entered into with the Department CEO on behalf of the State, a health service provider or the Minister)
- A public health service
- Any other facility specified by the Chief Health Officer.

Staff working in tier one areas — such as intensive care units, high dependency units, respiratory wards, COVID-19 clinics and vaccination centres — will be required to have one dose by 1 October and be fully vaccinated in November. From 1 November, all other health care workers will be required to have one dose to be able to work in public and private hospitals.

By 1 December, all other health care and support workers will be required to have at least one dose and be fully vaccinated by the new year to access support service and health provider sites.

**Further details:** [WA Health](#)

# Dementia Action Week

We are fortunate to count a group of expert dementia researchers and clinicians among our National Gerontology Committee. They are not just working on a joint position statement with Dementia Australia but have also contributed to a suite of impressive resources developed by the APA communications and marketing team.

The social media content focuses on the benefits of physiotherapy-led exercise in dementia delay and management to mark Dementia Action Week from 20 – 26 September 2021.

They send clear messages that keeping physically active with a physiotherapist is important to staying physically healthy and delay symptoms, and physiotherapists can identify injuries and pain in people living with dementia where communication barriers exist.

Please engage with these posts on Facebook, Twitter, Instagram and LinkedIn.

[#DementiaActionWeek](#)

**5 facts about dementia and physical activity**

**1 Dementia is not an inevitable part of ageing**  
Physios can play an important role in health promotion. About 40% of cases may be attributed to modifiable risk factors such as physical inactivity. (Lancet 2020)

**2 Physical activity reduces the risk of dementia**  
Physical activity appears to reduce brain ageing, and cognitive decline in people with mild cognitive impairment and dementia.

**3 Strength, balance and functional exercise can improve mobility for people with dementia**  
Moderate to high intensity multi-modal exercise can improve balance, functional strength and mobility, and is beneficial for improving ADLs, in people living with dementia.

**4 Dementia is associated with an increased risk of falls**  
Exercise interventions that include balance and functional training may be effective in preventing falls.

**5 How you engage and interact with people with dementia makes all the difference**

**Reduce Dementia Risk**

- Physical activity
- Quit smoking
- Reduce alcohol
- Healthy weight
- Mental stimulation
- Social engagement

**BREAKING NEWS**

Exercise may help reduce neuropsychiatric symptoms associated with dementia.

Infographic funded by: Physiotherapy Research Foundation, P4 PA

**DEMENTIA ACTION WEEK**

**'A LITTLE SUPPORT MAKES A BIG DIFFERENCE' - DEMENTIA AUSTRALIA**

Physiotherapists identify injuries and pain in people living with dementia where communication barriers exist.

They are skilled in identifying changes and analysing movement patterns that may indicate injury or pain.

Physiotherapy Research Foundation, physio

**DEMENTIA ACTION WEEK**

**PHYSICAL ACTIVITY IS IMPORTANT FOR PEOPLE LIVING WITH DEMENTIA**

It can help improve physical health, cognitive performance, mood, and address isolation and loneliness.

Plus, keeping physically active with a physiotherapist can enable people living with dementia to be part of community activities.

Physiotherapy Research Foundation, physio

**DEMENTIA ACTION WEEK**

**Myth**

Dementia only affects older people.

**Fact**

Dementia can affect *anyone* at *any* age, including young adults.

Physiotherapy Research Foundation, physio



# Digital health

## Australian Institute of Health and Welfare

The APA continues to engage with the Australian Institute of Health and Welfare (AIHW) and support them with their physiotherapy data capacity and capability project. Physiotherapy has been chosen as the first allied health profession to participate in the development of a primary care data asset build. This has been a work in progress over nine months with the agency.

The work has involved the development of a digital health audit to better understand how the profession is using digital technologies in practice. The APA continues to engage with the AIHW in an advisory capacity as the project continues.

## Australian Digital Health Agency

The APA continues to meet fortnightly with the Australian Digital Health Agency (ADHA) to discuss Australia's future digital healthcare strategy and the possible role that the physiotherapy profession can play in delivering it. You can have your say in National Digital Health Strategy on its recently launched website.

The ADHA has also created information on its Facebook, Twitter and LinkedIn accounts on accessing COVID-19 digital certificates in My Health Record, and related FAQs for consumers.

**Further details:** [National Strategy](#)

## PROMS

The APA has organised a number of meetings to progress the current PRF-funded research program on PROMs collection. We met with the Victorian Transport Accident Commission (TAC) to look at how PROMs could be used effectively as part of the TAC Beyond 2020 strategy. These meetings are working toward the next phase of advocacy efforts when the PRF-funded research project is completed and the learnings can be used to progress further activities.

## Telehealth

The APA is contributing to the TAC-funded research project in collaboration with Deakin University examining the impacts of telehealth on TAC clients during the pandemic. The APA is involved in the steering committee of this project, which will provide input to TAC on future use and funding of telehealth.

The APA has also been asked to sit on the steering committee of a TAC-funded research project being led by Deakin University on the impacts and outcomes of the use of telehealth in non-hospitalised patients.



## Services Australia

Services Australia has advised the APA that work in key digital claiming and data channels are being upgraded from current software to web-based services, and members may need to action to transfer to the new system.

This will affect:

- Medicare Online
- Department of Veterans' Affairs - via Medicare Online
- Australian Immunisation Register - via Medicare Online
- ECLIPSE
- PBS Online
- Aged Care Online.

These changes are designed to improve security and useability of the digital claiming and data channels.

From 13 March 2022, providers must use web services compatible software to access these digital health and aged care channels.

If your software isn't web services ready by 13 March 2022, claims and transmissions may need to revert to an alternative channel where available. This may create additional administrative pressure and costs for your business.

The current security and authentication will be replaced with a system called Provider Digital Access (PRODA) that users will need to transfer to.

MCOL/ECLIPSE users must contact their software developer to confirm if their site needs to register their organisation in PRODA to use their web services compatible software.

For PBS Online and Aged Care Online users, the site must register their organisation in PRODA to use their web services compatible software.

There are a number of ways a site can set up their organisation in PRODA.

**Further details:** [Services Australia eKit](#)

**Enquiries:** [SA.WEBSERVICES@servicesaustralia.gov.au](mailto:SA.WEBSERVICES@servicesaustralia.gov.au)



# Disability

The Policy team have discussed strategic next steps in National Disability Insurance Scheme (NDIS) advocacy with Allied Health Professions Australia (AHPA). We also shared our work on the Care Workforce consultation to contribute to AHPA's submission on NDIS workforce.

The Policy team attended a presentation given by National Disability Insurance Agency (NDIA) to the AHPA Disability group on the Home and Living consultation. With the support from the Disability Group, APA member Suzanne Currie participated in the allied health workshop held by the NDIA on the Home and Living consultation to collect direct feedback from providers and those working with people with disability.

We are monitoring the issue of the prescription of assistive technology policy and the risks to professional indemnity Insurance. AHPA is taking the lead advocacy on the matter.

**Further details:** [NDIA policy](#)

## Submissions

We have coordinated the APA's profession's response to the Disability Support Pension Impairment tables review by the Department of Social Services (DSS). The Policy team has participated in a briefing provided by DSS and engaged with relevant national groups. The submission is not yet publically available.

The Policy team has also supported the APA's contribution to National Assistive Technology Alliance's response to the NDIA Request for Information on Early Childhood Assistive Technology. The joint response is available on the Advocacy page of the APA website.

**Further details:** [Disability Support Pension Impairment tables review](#); [Joint Response](#)



# Government Relations

APA National President Scott Willis and CEO Anja Nikolic have presented the landmark *Economic Value of Physiotherapy in Australia* report to Minister for Health and Aged Care Greg Hunt. Following the successful meeting, the Minister requested a range of detailed follow-up materials. The papers explore a range of options across different topics, and provide an overview of the issue, the role of physiotherapy, supporting evidence via academic references or international examples, and an outline of a scalable pilot project with a view of introducing reform to the health system.

## Mental health and suicide prevention

### Select Committee on Mental Health and Suicide Prevention

APA National President Scott Willis gave evidence at a public hearing of the Select Committee on Mental Health and Suicide Prevention calling for a structural reform of the mental health care system to formalise the role of physiotherapists. We issued a media release emphasising how Australia's mental health system limits multidisciplinary and inter-disciplinary care.

Scott was then interviewed on Bumma Bippera Media radio.

**Further details:** [Media release](#); [Radio Interview](#)

### Black Dog Institute

APA National President Scott Willis met with several representatives from the Black Dog Institute to discuss the mental health needs of physiotherapists and their patients, and APA's priority policy messages and desired outcomes.

The Black Dog Institute runs The Essential Network, a confidential online mental health service designed by health professionals for health professionals.

**Further details:** [The Essential Network](#)

### National Mental Health Workforce Strategy

We met with representatives from Acil Allen to provide feedback on the development of the National Mental Health Workforce Strategy 2021-2031. We contributed a written submission to the consultation on the draft strategy, stressing the need to formalise the role of physiotherapy in mental health, importance of multidisciplinary and collaborative approach to mental health care, and that this should be embedded in any workforce strategy. The submission is not yet publically available.

**Further details:** [National Mental Health Workforce Strategy 2021-2031](#)

# Primary Health Networks

Our Primary Health Network (PHN) national strategy and approach aims to help members connect with these key bodies to strengthen viability of services and expand access opportunities for patients to physiotherapy.

APA National President Scott Willis and CEO Anja Nikolic presented at an all-in CEO Primary Health Network (PHN) meeting on 13 July 2021. The purpose of the briefing was to bring the national PHN executives across the findings of the *Economic Value of Physiotherapy in Australia* report. This relationship milestone is a great start in establishing a stronger partnership at senior levels. It was also the first time the PHN Cooperative invited a peak body of any discipline to brief the group.

As a result, the APA have met recently with Brisbane South PHN to discuss potential projects and collaboration. Other opportunities include a First Contact Practitioner pilot opportunity for North Western Melbourne PHN, a possible supervision project for Tasmania and ensuring we provide strategic input to the PHN's national digital health framework project.

We also encourage members to connect with your PHNs locally to ensure you and your practice is across opportunities.

## Steps to joining

[Here's a link to the first step: Find your local PHN](#)

From there, just register for updates in the 'connect with us' tab or similar so you can join your community and be kept informed about opportunities.

# Rural health

## Submission

The APA is preparing a submission to the Senate Standing Committee on Community Affairs into the *Provision of General Practitioner and Related Primary Health Services to Outer Metropolitan, Rural and Regional Australians*. We are disappointed with the narrow scope of the inquiry, which focuses predominantly on the issues related to the general practitioner workforce in rural and remote Australia. Within the submission, we are also addressing our concerns about physiotherapy workforce shortages and the need for policy change to address these issues.

## Rural generalist poll

The APA thanks those who took part in the recent rural generalist poll. There was overwhelming support for the development of a Rural Generalist: Physiotherapy pathway with work commencing on the next steps of development. Those who expressed interest in being a part of the working group will be contacted shortly.

# Veterans

## Telehealth

Telehealth services and other temporary COVID-19 arrangements for the Department of Veterans' Affairs (DVA) clients have been extended until 31 December 2021.

Treatment cycle arrangements continue to apply to DVA clients seeking to access allied health services through telephone and video conferencing. Where required, clients may also access a GP referral for clinically required allied health treatment via a telehealth consultation.

Updated information on temporary COVID-19 health arrangements is now available on the DVA website. The department is also updating the allied health fee schedules with the extension of the telehealth items and to apply indexation, with effect on 1 July 2021.

## Active Choices

Active Choices, a University of Queensland (UQ) research project funded by DVA, has closed recruitment with 35 participants signing up. The main focus now is to deliver the intervention and outcome measures, with program sessions running until mid-October. The aim of the project is to link to DVA clients towards group-based physical activity opportunities.

The purpose of the research is to collect information on best practices that may help DVA clients transition to active lifestyles that are socially connected to local communities.

The UQ team partners with exercise physiology and physiotherapy service providers, to offer access to the Active Choices support program for DVA clients who are interested in self-managing their physical activity. The program may also benefit DVA clients seeking to reconnect with their local communities following the easing of COVID-19 restrictions.

## Boosting Local Care Workforce

The APA is attending a roundtable meeting coordinated by the Boosting Local Care Workforce as requested by the Department of Social Services to explore the service profile, nature, and composition of DVA-administered services. The information will be used to inform our understanding of issues impacting the delivery of services and future policy development.





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