



The APA Valuing Skills Series

Physiotherapy in aged care



A focus on skills

Physiotherapists demonstrate the clinical capability and judgement to prescribe, implement and supervise evidence-based, safe, effective programs in home, community and residential aged care settings.

Physiotherapists demonstrate the clinical capability and judgement to address the often complex needs of older Australians. Physiotherapists are highly qualified health professionals who diagnose, manage, treat and review patients living with complex conditions. They have a broad scope of practice including falls prevention, cardiorespiratory rehabilitation, continence management and maintaining the physical and psychological wellbeing of people living with dementia. As key members of the multidisciplinary care team in aged care settings, physiotherapists work with the medical, nursing and allied health staff, contributing to care planning, maximising client function, prescribing equipment and implementing safe manual handling plans. Physiotherapists bring additional value, beyond exercise prescription, to the care of older people. They are trained and qualified to diagnose deterioration in overall health including arthritis, pain, cardiorespiratory, vestibular and neurological conditions.

Physiotherapy is central to diagnosing, treating and managing complex conditions that contribute to falls such as incontinence, vertigo, dementia and chronic pain.

Physiotherapy management is effective in reducing pain and in improving quality of life, physical functioning and depression.

Physiotherapy treatment for pain incorporates patient-specific education and pain management skills training along with movement-based strategies, focusing on empowering the person in pain to return to activity and function safely.



Physiotherapists assess the baseline abilities of people with a range of conditions that present throughout the life span.

Physiotherapists diagnose potential underlying conditions or symptoms contributing to falls risk, treat/manage those risk factors and refer to a physician or specialist where clinically indicated.

Physiotherapists prescribe individualised progressive programs of resistance training and balance and vestibular exercises to clients according to their presentation. Physiotherapists apply sound clinical reasoning to each individual to develop, progress and monitor rehabilitation programs that improve their condition and manage any pain symptoms.

Physiotherapy is an important part of a holistic post-diagnostic dementia support pathway.

Physiotherapy-led exercise improves fitness and motor skills such as gait and balance, reverses frailty, slows cognitive decline and improves engagement, reducing agitation and stabilising moods.

Physiotherapists work with people living with dementia to maintain and maximise their physical health, prevent falls and support their cognitive needs. Physiotherapists are experts in prescribing tailored, purposeful and meaningful activities and exercises, working individually or as part of interdisciplinary teams.

Physiotherapists can diagnose physical conditions causing behavioural change, such as unmet needs or pain, in people living with dementia who may have communication difficulties.



Physiotherapy is key to treating and managing incontinence. While incontinence is common among older people, it is not normal and is often under-reported.

Pelvic health physiotherapists assess, diagnose and treat both urinary and faecal stress and urge incontinence.



Pelvic health physiotherapists are highly skilled and experienced professionals who have undertaken additional specific training in pelvic health conditions. They use a number of diagnostic tools, including internal examinations and ultrasounds, to diagnose causes of incontinence in men and women.

Physiotherapists prescribe various courses of treatment, including individualised pelvic floor muscle training, and educate patients about their condition and how to better manage it. Pelvic health physiotherapists work closely with physicians, recommending further diagnostic testing and medication and requesting a referral to medical specialists where required.