

22 March 2022

Senator the Hon Richard Colbeck
Minister for Senior Australians and Aged Care Services
Parliament House
Via email: senator.colbeck@aph.gov.au

Dear Minister,

I write to you regarding an article in the Nine/Fairfax papers on 19 March, 2022, "Government takes aim at allied health in aged care".

The Australian Physiotherapy Association (APA) is concerned that this article gives a misleading impression about physiotherapy and the care we provide.

As we discussed when I met with you last year, physiotherapists are highly trained allied health professionals who work with aged care residents to improve their mobility, reduce falls, and provide essential rehabilitation after illness and injury.

The Australian Physiotherapy Association has worked cooperatively and transparently with the Morrison Government and across the Aged Care sector to ensure that physiotherapy services in aged care are appropriate and optimised to improve quality of life.

The comment in the article, "aged care homes are wasting money on allied health services such as physiotherapy" is disrespectful of the profession.

When Prime Minister Morrison announced the Royal Commission into Aged Care Quality and Safety in September 2018, he stated, "We are committed to providing older Australians with access to care that supports their dignity and recognises the contribution that they have made to society. If you care about aged care, which those who work in the sector do, you will want it to be at its very best."

The Prime Minister rightly told Australians "we expect high standards for the quality and safety of aged care services. This Royal Commission will be about proactively determining what we need to do in the future to ensure these expectations can be met."

The current prescriptive funding of residential aged care services, in place since 2007, is woefully inadequate.

The Aged Care Finding Instrument (ACFI) specifies the types of therapies aged care residents can have and how often. Under the ACFI, physiotherapists can deliver massage and electrotherapy to residents once or four times per week as assessed by aged care providers in accordance with the strict rules set by the Government.

It is disappointing to read claims that physiotherapists have 'over serviced' older people in residential aged care despite adhering to the dictates of this outdated system. Many of our 31,000 members have contacted me, upset that this accusation has been put in the public domain without the APA being afforded the opportunity to discuss this issue with you beforehand.

The APA has advised the Government, the Royal Commission, and aged care providers that this system falls well short of meeting the complex healthcare needs of older people and urged the adoption of more effective therapies.

After two years of hearing expert and witness evidence including from numerous older people and their advocates, the Royal Commission recommended that access to “critical allied health services such as physiotherapy” in residential aged care be increased. It did so with a strong belief that the “system should be based on a universal right to high quality, safe and timely support and care to assist older people to live an active, self-determined and meaningful life, and ensure older people receive high quality care in a safe and caring environment for dignified living in old age”.

As you know, a new funding mechanism, the Australian National Aged Care Classification (AN-ACC), is scheduled to be introduced in October. It is an improvement on what we have now, however, it is still unclear how the Royal Commission’s recommendations to increase physiotherapy services will be implemented.

Ignoring the Royal Commission’s evidence and findings about the criticalness of high value care for frail, elderly people - most of whom are not mobile and have no independence – takes away their choice and control about their own care.

The uncertainty about the future of allied health in the sector may result in a decrease in clinical management by physiotherapists and our professionals exiting the sector.

I request an opportunity to meet with you as soon as possible to discuss the reported media comments, and to explore ways we can improve the provision of health care to residents in aged care facilities.

Please contact Simon Tatz, General Manager, Policy and Government Relations, on 0402 613 745 or simon.tatz@australian.physio.

Your sincerely



National President

Australian Physiotherapy Association