

## Our **advocacy priorities** for the 2022 Victorian Election

### Strengthening access to physiotherapy for all Victorians

Physiotherapy provides a path to better health and wellbeing but for too many Victorians access is denied or inadequately funded. The current health system leaves too many people isolated and disconnected and without access to the essential care they need. Many Victorians cannot access the health care they need and deserve. Long wait times, fragmented services and affordability factors impact significantly on access to essential care for a number of high-priority groups.

We need to strategically prioritise access and outcomes beginning with lifting the barriers to access. A key opportunity lies in building capacity from within physiotherapy, lifting barriers and by charting a path to better health equity. Musculoskeletal advanced and extended scope of clinical practice physiotherapists can make a real impact on value and the patient journey including improving patient wait times and ensuring more timely access to appropriate treatment and investigations.

### Priority Asks

Investment in physiotherapy will advance health, improve care, and increase value.

#### 01 BETTER COMMUNITY CARE

The rising tide of chronic disease cannot be addressed without significant reform to drive prevention and early intervention into the system. In addressing complex care needs, funding care pathways in primary care are lacking in Victoria, particularly for those with multi-morbidity. The APA is calling for stronger health access plans to ensure Victorians have access to the care they need including stronger investment in publicly funded physiotherapy to increase the coverage of preventive health services in Victoria.

#### 02 PHYSIOTHERAPY IN THE HOSPITAL

Chronic underfunding has led to declining public hospital performance. Physiotherapists possess a wide range of skills that support a patient's journey through the hospital system. The APA is calling for these skills to be further utilised to alleviate the pressures currently experienced in the Victorian hospital system. We are also calling for funding for physiotherapy-led osteoarthritis pre-and post-operative packages to support recovery.

#### 03 RURAL PHYSIOTHERAPY

Targeted investment and realignment of funding priorities is critical to address vast unmet need in rural Victoria. The APA is calling for funding to enable the inclusion of physiotherapy services in the delivery of multidisciplinary care in rural health settings. We are also calling for stronger models to enable integrated care to strengthen access to care and build capacity of health service delivery in rural areas. This includes state level partnerships with Primary Health Networks (PHNs) to fund physiotherapy-led models of care in rural Victoria.

#### 04 WORKFORCE REFORMS

More focus is required on investment for all health disciplines experiencing shortages alongside funded solutions to achieving an optimal balance of skill mix in addressing patient need. A priority must be placed on the professionally qualified clinical and regulated staff groups, including both doctors and nurses, encompassing a number of vital allied health professions. This group, includes physiotherapy, the fourth largest group of registered primary health care professionals— where we are now facing a supply crisis, and in need of urgent nationally directed interventions.

## FOCUS AREA ONE

# Better community care to improve health outcomes for Victorians

Physiotherapy provides value to Victorians at all stages of life and in response to many different life events. However, it is often underutilised despite strong evidence for integrated care models that include allied health services. We need to instigate solutions beyond outdated medical models and sole discipline focus to get the best health and efficiency outcomes.

Physiotherapists routinely interact with high-risk populations in need of preventive care in primary health care settings, hospitals and community health services, and can embed health promotion and prevention activities into routine care. Physiotherapists are perceived by the general public as highly credible and trusted health care practitioners. The cost-effectiveness of our interventions is proven both in the literature and through cost-benefit analysis. The APA commissioned the Nous Group to undertake a landmark analysis of the value of a range of physiotherapy interventions (Nous Group, 2020). By doing so, we have, for the first time, built a robust picture of our high-level impacts and the value this provides to the health care sector.

### Priority 1.1 | **Physiotherapy-led early intervention and prevention strategies**

**Action:** Invest in public funded physiotherapy to increase the coverage of preventive health services in Victoria.

Physiotherapy helps people of all ages to prevent, manage and/or rehabilitate injury, illness or disability and screen for a range of preventive health issues. Community-based physiotherapy also has a key role in preventing hospitalisation or to reduce the length of hospitalisation.

The APA is calling for a greater focus on improving access to physiotherapy services for all Victorians, particularly priority populations that stand to benefit the most from physiotherapy to support prevention and maintenance of chronic conditions. In particular this should include greater use of, and access to, generalist and advanced practice physiotherapists to reduce hospital and medical clinic wait lists, reduce costs, and improve outcomes for patients.

Primary preventive strategies that include mechanisms to enable multidisciplinary teams, including physiotherapists, are also needed. Physiotherapists have a unique skill set in promoting physical activity with specific clinical populations across a broad scope including for prevention and maintenance of chronic conditions, falls prevention, prevention of workplace injuries, prevention of chronic pain, prevention of sporting injuries, and maintenance of function in those with a disability.

### Priority 1.2 | **A Long Covid rehabilitation pathway**

**Action:** Prioritise access to physiotherapy in Covid-19 recovery including Long Covid rehabilitation pathway planning and delivery.

The role of physiotherapists during the Covid-19 pandemic has been vital. We have worked from admission to rehabilitation and have a critical role in helping Covid-19 patients navigate their recovery. Physiotherapists will also be key to managing Long Covid rehabilitation pathways where a good multidisciplinary response is essential. Investment in publicly funded physiotherapy to drive new models of care including in responding to Long Covid will be required.

The profession offer Long Covid patients tailored, individualised treatments; they have qualifications and experience with chronic disease management, assisting in fatigue management, pacing, individualised activity management, pain management, strength and control improvements and productivity advice. Physiotherapists will be central to rehabilitation and recovery programs. Rehabilitation programs can also help ease fatigue and improve the mood of people with ongoing Covid-19 symptoms.

## FOCUS AREA TWO

# Better use of hospital and community services to improve patient flow

The path to better health is to optimise the patient journey by removing the current barriers and by enabling the patient to follow well-understood pathways with clear steps to vital care including physiotherapy. By advancing hospital and community physiotherapy we offer pathways that maximise the contribution of physiotherapists in inpatient, outpatient and community-based services, in both private and public hospitals, provide significant benefits to the patient and the health care system.

Physiotherapy offers solutions in both managing demand and playing an important role in avoiding admissions and in lowering readmission rates. From the Emergency Department, where expertly managed dizziness, soft tissue injuries and low back pain, to almost every ward of acute and subacute health services, through home-based rehabilitation and in community health centres, physiotherapists work to improve people's health and keep them well, improving access to care for all Victorians. Physiotherapists are a highly trained and specialised, flexible and adaptable workforce who have proven to be at the forefront of Advanced Practice in Victoria for over 15 years.

### Priority 2.1 | **Advanced practice physiotherapy in acute care**

**Action:** Develop advanced practice physiotherapy roles to improve the patient journey.

Advanced practice (AP) physiotherapists hold high levels of clinical expertise to assess and independently manage specific patient cohorts. They provide a solution to current workforce pressures with the potential to create a more efficient hospital system through further utilising the skills possessed by physiotherapists. Advanced practice clinics and services have been implemented in a number of areas in Victoria. The APA is calling for further investment to develop advanced practice physiotherapy roles and therefore enable the full potential of the workforce to be utilised

### Priority 2.2 | **Expand and implement pre and post-surgery interventions**

**Action:** Fund physiotherapy-led rehabilitation programs for pre-and post-operative packages.

Physiotherapy is a valuable and cost-effective alternative to other interventions, such as surgery, in the management of osteoarthritis.

We have seen waitlists for orthopaedic surgeries significantly increase in Victoria following the lockdowns of 2020 and 2021 resulting in prolonged pain and disability for those awaiting surgery. In addition to supporting post-operative rehabilitation, physiotherapists can assist those currently on surgical waitlists in managing their pain and maintaining functional activities. The APA is calling for funding to further expand and implement existing physiotherapy-led pre and post-operative packages.

## Hospital care



**Hospital care** in acute, rehabilitation and in home care

### Acute care



Provide assessment and treatment to improve strength, function and mobility. Assist and advise on discharge planning.

Respiratory conditions, cardiac care, intensive care units, gerontology, oncology, post surgical care.

### Rehabilitation



Deliver treatment focusing on improving strength and functional independence to enable safe discharge.

Neurological conditions, joint replacements, long illness, amputation, pulmonary and cardiac rehabilitation, accidents and injuries.

### Home care



Support early discharge by providing treatment and rehabilitation in the home.

Stroke, post fall, long hospital stay, traumatic brain injury, chronic disease management.

## FOCUS AREA THREE

### Prioritising rural physiotherapy

Every community across Victoria deserves access to vital health services including physiotherapy, however many rural communities have no physiotherapy services, contributing to disparities in health care. Stronger investment in publicly funded rural physiotherapy and integrating prevention into the management and delivery of care will help address health disparities. Rural health reform beyond medicine has been slow and fragmented. Targeted investment and realignment of funding priorities is critical to enable inclusion of physiotherapy services in the delivery of multidisciplinary care in rural health settings.

The APA welcomed the rural and regional health commitment in this year's Victorian Budget which committed to closing the gap in health inequality for the 23 per cent of Victorians who live in rural and remote areas. However, to address entrenched inequities, we need to fund innovative rural models of care, encompassing physiotherapy and allied health, to enable fully integrated care. This includes ensuring funding for rural telehealth to supplement and support the success and sustainability of a service. Scaling up and replicating these successful models is vital, as a sustainable service is reliant on ongoing access to funds beyond grant rounds. Enabling the Primary Health Networks (PHNs) to advance physiotherapy-led models of care to address service delivery challenges in rural areas is also key.

#### Priority 3.1 | **Strengthen access to rural physiotherapy**

**Action:** Fund physiotherapy and allied health to enable more integrated care, strengthen access to physiotherapy and build capacity of health service delivery in rural Victoria.

We need more focus on how access to physiotherapy can be improved for those who need it the most. There is a need to support innovative models of care, including reform of primary care that allows patient access to physiotherapy as publicly funded first contact practitioners. In addition, supporting extended scope physiotherapists as primary practitioners able to refer to specialist medical practitioners, will better utilise the existing workforce, cut red tape and add value to GP services enabling them to dedicate more time to clinical care.

#### Priority 3.2 | **Building a sustainable rural physiotherapy workforce**

**Action:** Provide incentives to attract more physiotherapists to address vast unmet need in rural Victoria.

Strategies to support retention requires a strong commitment to improving the policies, programs and infrastructure specifically targeted to building capacity for allied health service provision. Recognition of rural practitioners as a highly skilled, supported and a valued resource is also needed to incentivise career choices in rural health. There is a need to incentivise the allied health professions in the same way GPs are to work in regional, rural and remote areas to improve income streams and make it more viable to practise rurally. Strategies implemented federally including the Workforce Incentive Program (WIP) have failed due to their flawed design which directs funding through GP clinics. This essentially puts the only physiotherapy in town out of business. The APA is calling on the Victorian Government to offer support and initiatives to assist in growing Victoria's rural physiotherapy workforce.

## FOCUS AREA FOUR

# Workforce reform and building a better pipeline to the workforce

We need to tackle the critical workforce shortage in physiotherapy.

From a health workforce perspective, the APA supports a strong focus on the care and support sector where policy inaction has seen the skills profile of this vital workforce deteriorate. It is this workforce that remains the most undervalued, resulting in low job satisfaction and low relative pay and it must be prioritised.

The APA believes a wider policy lens is needed to seek opportunities from within the entire health workforce, a workforce that is in desperate need of attention, investment and reform. The broader economic benefits found through efficiencies by moving care from hospitals into primary and community health services, and at the primary and acute care interface as a key policy aim will require a broad set of disciplines. Investing in the development of physiotherapists is essential to delivering on these commitments and taking the pressures off the high cost parts of the system.

Health workforce reform will need a broader focus on skill retention and a level of policy and planning alignment to fully examine the changing profiles. Greater focus on the improved utilisation of skills through advanced scope of practice roles to address current and future workforce issues will be needed. In addition, reform must tackle the existing system complexities including removing barriers to integrated care.

### Priority 4.1 | Valuing skills

**Action:** Funding to develop the existing physiotherapy workforce including enabling upskilling and advanced skill acquisition.

Health workforce policies to increase the skills of the workforce is important to raising productivity. A focus on attracting and retaining critical skills and enabling higher-level skills is vital to addressing quality and supply concerns. This will require a sustained policy effort with focus on enabling the required workforce transitions to new models of care across the health system. Investment in new publicly funded physiotherapy is needed to drive new models of care. The APA is calling for increased funding to develop the existing physiotherapy workforce including enabling upskilling and advanced skill acquisition to manage increasing complexity and co-morbidities.

### Priority 4.2 | Student placements

**Action:** Funding to support clinical placements.

As an autonomous profession it is essential physiotherapists are prepared to enter the workforce upon graduation. As such, physiotherapy training programs include clinical placements to provide the opportunity for students to implement their learning in a supervised environment.

Due to an increasing number of training programs, there is a growing demand for clinical placements.

There are a funding barriers limiting the ability of health services and physiotherapy practices to support students. Specific to private practice, current legislation makes it difficult, and sometimes financially unviable, for physiotherapists in this setting to support students. This has the potential to impact the preparedness of the next generation of physiotherapists. The APA is calling for funding opportunities to support physiotherapy businesses in providing clinical supervision and training.





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9 November 2022

Dear Ms Horvat

**Re: APA advocacy priorities for the 2022 Victorian state election**

I am pleased to provide the following response to the APA's advocacy priorities on behalf of the Victorian Greens—

**1. Better community care to improve health outcomes for Victorians**

**1.1 Early intervention and prevention with physiotherapy-led health strategies**

*The Victorian Greens support the APA's calls for a greater focus on improving access to physiotherapy services for all Victorians. We also support in principle the mandating of minimum thresholds for investment in preventative health in the government health budget.*

**1.2 A Long-COVID rehabilitation pathway**

*The Victorian Greens recognise Long-COVID will likely have significant health impacts on many Victorians, as well as exacerbating demand pressures on the health system. We further recognise that the pandemic is ongoing, and the full extent and impact of long covid is not known. Therefore, we support the ongoing monitoring and research of long covid and its effects on the health system to inform public health officials and government policy makers on appropriate public health strategies moving forward.*

*We also believe all governments, particularly state governments, must continue to develop and promote all reasonable infection mitigation policies based on public health advice to minimise the level of COVID-19 infections and reinfections in the community.*

**2. Better use of physiotherapists in hospital and community services to improve patient flow**

**2.1 Continuing development of physiotherapy roles to the full scope of practice, facilitating access and flow**

*The Victorian Greens recognise the value of AP physiotherapists and support in principle further investment in these roles.*

**2.2 Expand and implement pre and post-surgery interventions**



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*The Victorian Greens recognise the value of physiotherapy treatment as an alternative to some surgeries, with the potential to reduce surgical waiting lists. As part of our comprehensive health platform we announced a commitment to provide an additional \$1.3 billion to provide more out of hospital aged care, disability and rehab beds and services to reduce post operative hospital stays.*

### **3. Prioritising rural physiotherapy**

#### **3.1 Strengthen access to rural physiotherapy**

*The Victorian Greens support the state government taking a more active role in the provision of primary care by providing additional incentives to ensure services are made available where they are most needed.*

#### **3.2 Building a sustainable rural physiotherapy workforce.**

*The Victorian Greens support the APAs calls for the Victorian Government to offer support and initiatives to assist in growing Victoria's rural physiotherapy workforce.*

### **4. Workforce reform and building a better pipeline to the workforce**

#### **4.1 Valuing skills funding for the physiotherapy workforce to provide upskilling and advanced skill acquisition**

*The Victorian Greens support the undertaking of comprehensive workforce planning across all health professions and specialties through a consultative process by the Department of Health. The Greens health election platform also calls for the lifting of the public sector wage cap, to deliver fairer wages to allied health workers.*

#### **4.2 Funding to support clinical placements.**

*The Victorian Greens support the APA's calls for funding to support physiotherapy businesses in providing clinical supervision and training.*

Yours Sincerely

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads 'Tim Read'.

Dr Tim Read  
**Victorian Greens Spokesperson for Health**