



AUSTRALIAN
PHYSIOTHERAPY
ASSOCIATION

Physiotherapy: high-value care for all Queenslanders

Invest in physiotherapy and put patients first. Together, we can shape a healthier future for Queensland.

**Australian Physiotherapy Association 2024
Queensland Election Priorities**

Physiotherapy in context

Physiotherapists bring value-based and evidence-based expertise to patients and the health system. They are an important part of healthcare across the lifespan, with GPs referring more patients to physiotherapists than to any other single group. As primary contact practitioners, physiotherapists have the expertise to manage the care of patients at various stages of the chronic disease continuum.

In Australia, physiotherapists rank as the fourth largest group among registered primary health care professionals with Queensland having the third highest number of registered physiotherapists. They work in a number of settings, including hospitals, private practices, community health centres and universities.

Physiotherapists are highly qualified health professionals who work in partnership with their patients to help people get better and stay well. They assess, diagnose, treat and work to prevent injury, disease and disability through evidence-based interventions.

Physiotherapists work within diverse contexts of practice, including primary and community care and inpatient and outpatient services across emergency and acute, subacute and post-acute care. Their role extends to injury prevention, rehabilitation, maintenance of functional mobility, chronic disease management, health promotion, patient and carer education, occupational health and sport settings.

Physiotherapists are clinical leaders who work both individually and across multidisciplinary teams. The skills and training of physiotherapists equip them to work across a wide variety of conditions and disabilities to improve the health status of individuals across their lifespan. Physiotherapists also work to deliver improved population health outcomes within their local areas.

A physiotherapist can diagnose

Physiotherapists **diagnose** injuries and disorders associated with the musculoskeletal, cardiovascular and neurological systems.



Physiotherapists use clinical reasoning for diagnosis and treatment

Physiotherapists have clinical skills across all anatomical and neurophysiological domains and use evidence-informed **clinical reasoning** to assist and advise the patient, their medical practitioner, caregivers and their healthcare team in ongoing management.



Physiotherapists are regulated under the National Scheme

Physiotherapists must be **registered** with the Physiotherapy Board of Australia and meet the Board's registration standards to be able to practise in Australia.



Invest in physiotherapy to advance health, improve care and increase value

Physiotherapy is essential care for the close to 1.8 million Queenslanders who live with musculoskeletal conditions. Too many Queenslanders cannot access services for prevention, early detection and quality care. This means they have to live with chronic pain. Investing in publicly funded physiotherapy will advance health, improve care and increase value.

Reform begins by improving the patient pathway and physiotherapy plays an important role in this.

The Australian Physiotherapy Association (APA) has identified priority areas and solutions that will strengthen care for all Queenslanders, while also reducing inequity, through physiotherapy-led models.

We are calling on candidates for the 2024 Queensland election to support **five policy priorities**:



Invest in physiotherapy **non-operative pathways** and keep people out of hospital.



Optimise the **expertise of physiotherapists** at the community and hospital interface through funded support care transitions to improve patient outcomes and reduce length of stay.



Invest in **multidisciplinary team care** and support a sustainable workforce in rural Queensland.



Recognise the role of physiotherapy in the primary care of injured workers within **WorkCover Queensland**.



Fund, support and embed **advanced practice** physiotherapists in Queensland Health primary care settings.

These priorities provide solutions for the incoming Queensland Government to **invest in physiotherapy**, so we can realise real reform through improved access to essential care, reduced out-of-pocket costs and, most importantly, a decreased need for costly and inefficient treatments.

Invest in physiotherapy and put patients first

Physiotherapy provides a path to better health for all Queenslanders. Opportunities exist for the next Queensland Government to leverage physiotherapy in leading health reform. Long wait times, fragmented services, inadequate funding, workforce sustainability and affordability factors mean that the current health system leaves too many people without access to the essential care they need. It is those most in need, our high-priority groups, who are disproportionately affected.

The Queensland Government is at the forefront of national health reform, pioneers in bridging the gaps between acute and chronic care and in providing more equitable access. This reform leadership has set a benchmark and must be sustained. Yet, the journey doesn't end here.

The solutions that will fix healthcare lie in:

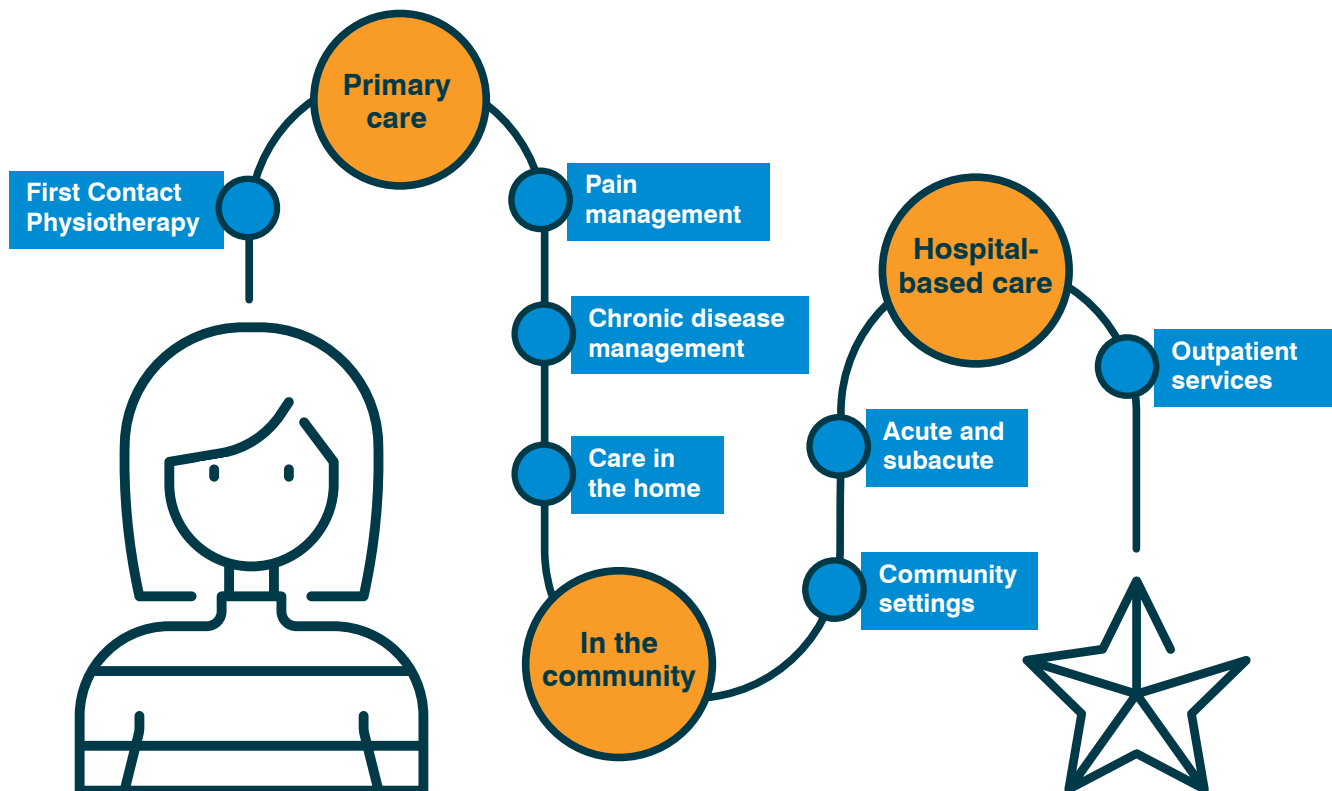
- valuing the skills of the entire health workforce
- integration
- lifting the structural barriers to strengthen access
- streamlining the patient journey.

It is through the priority areas and solutions outlined in this statement that we can begin to provide greater value to all Queenslanders.

In this 2024 Queensland Election Priorities Statement, the APA presents ways to connect and integrate care. The solutions will help deliver on the four outcomes that governments and patients want – high-value care, reduced costs, improved efficiency and enhanced patient ownership of their own healthcare.

How physiotherapy supports patient outcomes

A visual representation of the delivery of preventive care, treatment and rehabilitative physiotherapy services across the lifespan in selected populations and settings.



Our solutions will improve the patient journey, deliver cost-effective services and enhance patient care:



01 Use physiotherapy in non-operative care pathways

Physiotherapy provides alternative pathways that prevent unnecessary hospitalisation and reduce readmission rates. By keeping people out of hospital in the first place, we address the urgent need to alleviate the current pressures on the public hospital system. Therefore, investing in physiotherapy is a critical component of health reform.



02 Increase access to physiotherapy in hospital and community settings

Physiotherapists play a vital role in Queensland's hospital system and the community. They assess and treat a diverse range of patients and conditions. By investing in physiotherapy, we can improve patient flow through hospitals and Emergency Departments, providing more timely access to care. This will reduce the burden on the hospital system.



03 Support rural physiotherapy and a sustainable workforce

Including physiotherapy services in the delivery of multidisciplinary care in rural health settings is urgently needed to address vast unmet needs in rural Queensland. Stronger models of care will enable integrated care, strengthen access to care, and build the capacity of health service delivery in rural areas. A sustainable physiotherapy workforce in Queensland Health is essential to provide optimal care for rural Queenslanders.



04 Recognise primary care physiotherapy in workers' compensation scheme

Early and direct access to physiotherapy has been shown to reduce time off work, prevent acute problems from becoming chronic, reduce long-term pain and disability, and improve work function. A change in legislation to allow physiotherapists to have a greater role in determining work capacity by completing capacity certificates will increase return-to-work rates. Such arrangements have been successfully implemented in both NSW and Victoria—they have led to enhanced outcomes and increased rates of return to work for injured workers.



05 Recognise and fund advanced practice physiotherapist roles in hospitals and community settings

Advanced Practice physiotherapists are an integral part of our hospital system, working as key members of multidisciplinary teams in emergency, outpatient, acute care and rehabilitation.

The Musculoskeletal Physiotherapy Screening Clinic and Multi-disciplinary Service is an Advanced Practice physiotherapist-led model of care developed initially to address overburdened specialist orthopaedic outpatient public hospital services across Queensland. There is an urgent need for the expansion and consistent support of these services.

Increased funding of primary care-based intervention through **physiotherapy-led screening clinics** will ensure patients can be managed without surgery, including for osteoarthritis of the knee and hip, spinal and neurological conditions, continence issues, gynaecological conditions and paediatric specific disabilities.

PRIORITY AREA ONE



Use physiotherapy in **non-operative pathways** to keep Queenslanders out of hospital

Physiotherapy provides value to Queensland residents at all stages of life and in response to many different life events. However, physiotherapy is often underused, despite strong evidence suggesting that integrated care models which include physiotherapy services reduce the rates of hospitalisation and surgery. We need to instigate solutions beyond outdated medical-centric models to get the best health and efficiency outcomes.

Physiotherapists can make a greater contribution to primary healthcare to help prevent unnecessary hospitalisations. This will enable more timely and appropriate intervention.

Physiotherapists have the skills and knowledge to embed health promotion and prevention activities into routine care. The cost-effectiveness of physiotherapy interventions is proven in literature and through the cost-benefit analysis (Nous Group, 2020) which builds a robust picture of the high-level impacts and value that physiotherapy provides to the healthcare sector.

Value of physiotherapy in Australia

Physiotherapy delivers an average net-benefit for a range of life events and stages.



Falls Prevention

\$1,320



Back Pain

\$6,063



Stress urinary incontinence

\$16,814



Osteoarthritis of the knee and hip

\$3,772



Chronic neck pain

\$3,416



Emergency department services

\$24,028

(over 24 weeks)



Parkinson's disease

\$6,626

(over 10 weeks)



Tennis elbow

\$5,610



Cerebral palsy in children

\$1,502



Chronic obstructive pulmonary disease

\$2,436

(over two years)



Orthopaedic outpatient services

\$9,798

Source: Nous (2020)

Approach and methodology: Net-benefits were calculated accounting for quality of life improvements, the cost of service delivery, patient-time opportunity costs, the avoided costs of alternative or usual treatment, and calculated over a period of time. Please refer to full report for details. Nous Group. (2020). Value of Physiotherapy in Australia. Australian Physiotherapy Association. https://australian.physio/sites/default/files/Report_FA_WEB.pdf

Priority 1.1 | Invest in physiotherapy-led early intervention and prevention strategies

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

The APA is calling for improved access to physiotherapy services so all people in Queensland, particularly priority populations that stand to benefit the most from physiotherapy, can receive support for the prevention and maintenance of chronic conditions. This includes musculoskeletal conditions, continence issues and chronic obstructive pulmonary disease.

Birth trauma and incontinence

Pelvic floor physiotherapy in an outpatient setting can help prevent and treat incontinence by assessing and teaching appropriate pelvic floor exercises. This can reduce the likelihood of birth trauma, incontinence, lower back pain and other complications post-delivery which decreases surgical intervention rates and increases the quality of life for many patients.

Falls, fall-related fractures and hospitalisation prevention

Physiotherapy and fall-prevention strategies can keep people active and independent for longer. Publicly funded physiotherapy-led fall prevention programs keep older Australians out of hospital.

Priority 1.2 | Optimise patient outcomes during care transitions

Action: Prioritise physiotherapy-led in-home care funding and packages.

Physiotherapy improves patient physical function to facilitate a timely and safe discharge from hospital. It also reduces readmission rates by providing treatment and at-home rehabilitation for people with stroke, fall injuries, long hospital stays, traumatic brain injury, post-surgical conditions and chronic disease.

Priority 1.3 | Improve access to care pathways for chronic conditions

Action: Prioritise access to physiotherapy for people with chronic conditions.

Physiotherapy plays a vital role in the management of chronic conditions across musculoskeletal, pain, cardiorespiratory and neurological conditions. Current funding arrangements provide extremely limited access to allied health services for patients with chronic conditions. This is insufficient to address their complex needs.

Outpatient physiotherapy-led pulmonary rehabilitation programs provide education and exercise, empower chronic obstructive pulmonary disease and respiratory patients to self manage, and reduce the risk of hospitalisation and complications while in hospital.

PRIORITY AREA TWO



Increase access to physiotherapy in hospital and community settings, including minor injury, illness and urgent care clinics

Faster treatment, better health outcomes and lower costs are required to meet current and future healthcare needs in Queensland. The solutions that will fix healthcare lie in valuing the skills of the entire health workforce. Spending on physiotherapy will bring more value for money by reducing the need for costly secondary care.

Through Medicare Urgent Care Clinics and Minor Injury and Illness Clinics at satellite hospitals, we can test a new and more efficient pathway by having Advanced Practice physiotherapists work as primary care providers and first contact practitioners. This will provide faster access to diagnosis, treatment and care for patients with musculoskeletal pain and other conditions.

Priority 2.1 | Put physiotherapy services in Urgent Care Clinics

Action: Prioritise a publicly funded first contact physiotherapy service in Urgent Care Clinics and Minor Injury and Illness Clinics.

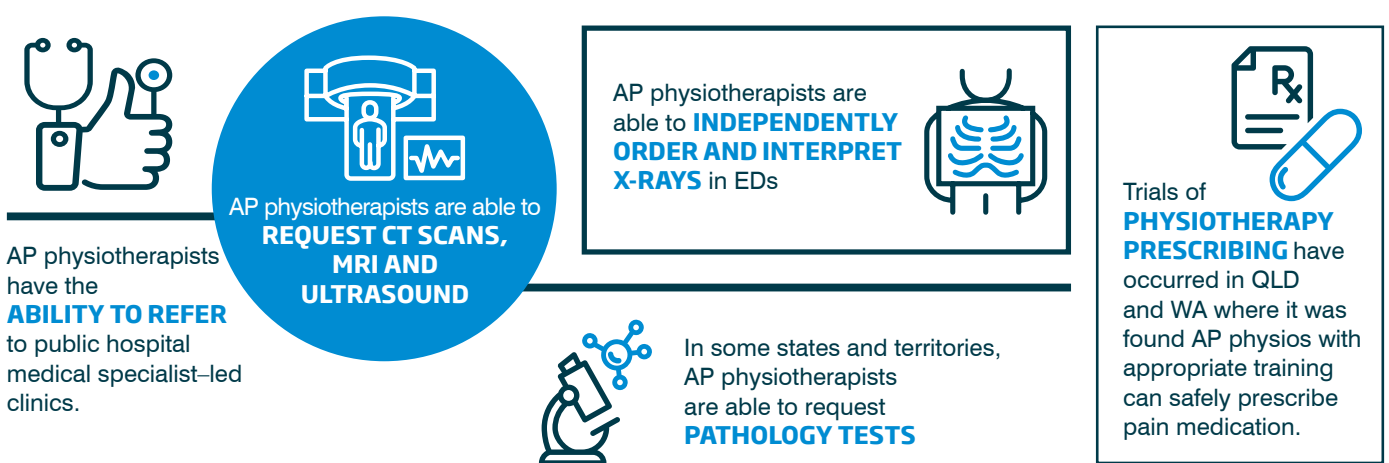
Physiotherapy is key to ensuring continuity of care across the primary and acute care interface. The practice can help alleviate the workloads of General Practitioners by diverting non-life threatening emergencies and keeping these types of patients out of the Emergency Department (ED). Rolling out first contact physiotherapy in primary care settings will benefit patients and the health system. It will lead to cost savings and free up the time of health workers.

Supporting physiotherapists to work at the top of their scope can address current inefficiencies in primary care and in the hospital sector

Advanced Practice (AP) ED physiotherapists are already well embedded in the state public healthcare system nationally, providing a sustainable and highly skilled workforce base from which to expand services at this level.

Expanding this workforce can help meet unmet patient need at the primary and acute care interface, including in the implementation of Medicare Urgent Care Clinics nationally. A significant proportion of the likely patient load in these clinics will be musculoskeletal conditions such as sprains, strains and spinal pain—conditions best managed by physiotherapists.

Advanced Practice physiotherapy roles require high levels of clinical expertise



Priority 2.2 | Create a more sustainable workforce by prioritising physiotherapy in hospitals and the community

Action: Prioritise physiotherapy in the public hospital system.

Physiotherapists play an important role in patient recovery. They facilitate a safe hospital discharge, reduce the length of a patient's stay and prevent hospital readmission. This frees up valuable health resources.

In response to Queensland Health's most significant workforce challenges, there is a need to focus on supporting and retaining the current physiotherapy workforce, building and attracting new pipelines of talent, and adapting and innovating to find new ways of delivering care. A continued investment will allow Queensland Health to build a sustainable and supported physiotherapy workforce, resulting in the delivery of high-quality healthcare across Queensland.

Priority 2.3 | Grant access to Queensland Health's The Viewer

Action: Give physiotherapists access to The Viewer application.

Physiotherapists are not currently able to access The Viewer, despite being treating healthcare providers. By giving Queensland physiotherapists access to The Viewer, it will improve our communication with ongoing and multidisciplinary care providers.

The APA asks that physiotherapists be seen as an essential part of Queensland's healthcare workforce by being given access to The Viewer.

PRIORITY AREA THREE



Support rural physiotherapy and a sustainable workforce

Every community across Queensland deserves access to vital health services. However, many rural communities have no access to physiotherapy services. This contributes to inequities in healthcare and adverse health outcomes. To address this, we need greater investment in publicly funded rural physiotherapy and prevention strategies integrated into the management and delivery of care.

Rural health reform beyond medicine has been slow and fragmented. Targeted investments and realigned funding priorities are critical ways we can ensure physiotherapy services are included in the delivery of multidisciplinary care in rural health settings.

Priority 3.1 | Strengthen access to rural physiotherapy

Action: Provide funding for physiotherapy and allied health services to enable more integrated care, strengthen access and build the capacity of rural Queensland's health service.

We must ensure that people who need physiotherapy the most can access it. Providing equitable access to care continues to be a fundamental challenge for rural physiotherapists working within private and public settings. A rural health strategy is needed to address the challenges of delivering services in rural communities and to ensure care can be tailored to the specific needs of locals.

New rural funding models are needed to drive fully integrated care that encompasses telehealth. There also needs to be more investment in incentivised team-based care arrangements to increase access for patients. These factors will lead to the success and sustainability of physiotherapy as a service. The results of our 2023 APA Workforce Census showed that one-third of the participants are willing to work rurally, especially those in the early stages of their career – but require financial assistance to relocate.

It is vital that we can scale up and replicate successful models of care, but it is reliant on ongoing access to funds beyond grant rounds. It is also important that we expand the capacity for primary health networks and fund physiotherapy solutions that will address the challenges faced by rural health services. The solutions need to support existing providers, as well as set up opportunities for workforce growth.

Priority 3.2 | Build a sustainable rural physiotherapy workforce

Action: Provide incentives to attract more physiotherapists to rural Queensland and address vast unmet needs for care.

The APA is calling on the Queensland Government to provide support and initiatives that will grow Queensland's rural physiotherapy workforce. There needs to be a focus on improving policies, programs and infrastructure so we can attract allied health professionals to rural areas and encourage them to stay.

Physiotherapists need to be incentivised to apply for rural roles in the same way that General Practitioners are. There should be recognition that physiotherapists are a highly skilled, supported and valued resource. We also need to commit to improving income streams and positioning physiotherapy in rural areas as a viable career choice.

Federal strategies, including the Workforce Incentive Program, have failed due to a flawed design which directs funding through General Practitioner clinics.

PRIORITY AREA FOUR



Recognise primary care physiotherapy in workers' compensation scheme

The APA supports the continuing development of healthy and viable compensable schemes which enable physiotherapists to deliver timely, cost-effective and high-value healthcare, thus achieving mutually beneficial scheme outcomes. The APA believes that ensuring adequate remuneration, as well as supporting and streamlining service provision for injured people across all state-based compensation schemes, is integral.

Physiotherapists are used regularly by workers' compensation insurers because musculoskeletal injuries account for the majority of work-related injuries.

Priority 4.1 | Commensurate recognition and remuneration for experience and skill

Action: Conduct a review of remuneration fees for the delivery of physiotherapy services within compensable schemes by APA titled physiotherapists (as awarded by the Australian College of Physiotherapists).

There have been inequities in fee increases over recent years. The increases have not kept up with health reform models, particularly considering the significant demands placed on physiotherapists to assist with the continued delivery of essential and advanced scope practice roles. The APA has significant concerns that if this is to continue it will result in lower value healthcare delivery which will ultimately cost the schemes more due to poorer health outcomes.

The APA urges a review of the current fee schedules related to the remuneration of APA titled physiotherapists to create an advantageous environment for an injured person's recovery. An APA titling credential is awarded to physiotherapists who have met formal assessment requirements and can demonstrate highly developed physiotherapy experience and knowledge in a field of practice.

Priority 4.2 | Enable streamlined physiotherapy service provision

Action: Conduct a review of the Queensland Workers' Compensation and Rehabilitation Act 2003, giving Queensland physiotherapists the authority to sign work capacity certificates.

Under the *Queensland Workers' Compensation and Rehabilitation Act 2003*, an application for compensation must be accompanied by a certificate given by a doctor, nurse practitioner (for a minor injury) or a registered dentist (for an oral injury). There is increasing evidence to suggest that providing physiotherapists with the authority to sign work capacity certificates will benefit Queenslanders. This is because it will reduce waiting times, improve access to timely and effective rehabilitation and lead to a faster return to suitable work duties.

Physiotherapists are first contact practitioners in the private practice setting. They also provide first contact services within Emergency Departments and Minor Injuries and Illness Clinics at satellite hospitals. Current legislation restricts physiotherapists from issuing work capacity certificates. This is a significant limitation. By giving workers with musculoskeletal injuries direct access to physiotherapists, it can reduce time off work, prevent acute problems from becoming chronic, reduce long-term pain and disability, and improve work function.

The Queensland Government has previously assured us they are committed to ensuring that rehabilitation and return-to-work strategies remain a priority for workers and employers. However, they have not shown the appetite to review current legislation to allow physiotherapists to issue work capacity certificates.

The APA calls on the Queensland Government to address the barriers preventing these changes, such as pursuing legislative change, persuading medical practitioners to relinquish the role of certification, and addressing concerns about misdiagnosis.

PRIORITY AREA FIVE



Recognise and fund **advanced practice** physiotherapy roles in hospitals and community settings

Advanced Practice physiotherapists hold high levels of clinical expertise to assess and independently manage specific patient cohorts. The APA calls for the Queensland Government to adopt and implement new ways for Advanced Practice physiotherapists to deliver care. This will reduce wait times in Emergency Departments and for hospital surgery waitlists and specialist reviews.

Physiotherapy plays an important role in managing patient demand by redirecting patient admissions and lowering readmission rates. Advanced Practice physiotherapists employ knowledge and skills across a wide range of musculoskeletal, cardiorespiratory and neurological conditions to improve people's health. They are highly trained and specialised professionals. Physiotherapists are a flexible and adaptable workforce and there are many who have been at the forefront of the Advanced Practice specialisation in Queensland for more than 15 years.

Priority 5.1 | More recognition for Advanced Practice physiotherapy roles

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

The APA is calling for further investment in developing Advanced Practice physiotherapy roles. This will ensure consistency in resourcing these roles across districts and networks, therefore enabling the full potential of the workforce to be used. There are barriers in the current award that prevent the full recognition of skills held by Advanced Practice physiotherapists.

Advanced Practice physiotherapists use advanced skills to assess, diagnose and manage complex medical conditions. The current award classification system fails to distinguish the unique role and responsibilities held by Advanced Practice physiotherapists, hindering appropriate recognition and funding allocation.

To ensure the sustainability and growth of Advanced Practice physiotherapy services, there is a need for a distinct classification within the Tier 2 structure. By recognising the vital role of Advanced Practice physiotherapists and providing adequate funding mechanisms, healthcare organisations can optimise patient care delivery and promote the continued advancement of physiotherapy services within the hospital setting.

The APA calls for a new funding tier for Advanced Practice physiotherapy practitioners and clinics.

Priority 5.2 | Triage and management of hospital specialist waiting lists

Action: Increase investment in physiotherapy-led screening clinics in local health districts and specialty health networks.

For most musculoskeletal conditions, non-operative care is the most appropriate treatment. Advanced Practice physiotherapists play a key role in the management of hospital specialist outpatient waiting lists by assessing and coordinating care pathways. Advanced Practice physiotherapists have high levels of diagnostic agreement with their medical colleagues. Physiotherapy-led orthopaedic triage clinics are also seen as an effective alternative to usual care in the short, immediate and long term. These clinics are highly cost-effective and reduce the need for more hospital medical officers and specialists.

The Musculoskeletal Physiotherapy Screening Clinic and Multi-disciplinary Service is an Advanced Practice physiotherapy-led model of care developed initially to address overburdened specialist orthopaedic outpatient public hospital services across Queensland.

The APA calls for sustained funding for these innovative service delivery models which address the rising demands on health services, ensuring people receive the right care, at the right time, in the right place, with the right resources and by the right person.