



Physiotherapy and Aged Care

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A path to better care

What is physiotherapy in residential aged care?

Physiotherapists work with residents in aged care facilities to maintain and improve mobility, reduce the risk of falls, address pain and provide treatment and rehabilitation services.

Residents should be assessed by a physiotherapist when they move to a facility and receive a review every six months. Residents should also see a physiotherapist when they return from hospital or incur an injury.

Physiotherapists work as part of multidisciplinary teams combining care staff, GPs, nurses and other allied health professionals. Physiotherapists work with care staff to develop manual handling and mobility plans to safely move residents and develop programs for individual and group exercise.

Symptoms and causes

Aged care residents often live with a range of medical conditions that physiotherapists are trained to assess and assist in managing.

Common conditions include:

- Arthritis
- Stroke
- Neurological conditions e.g. Parkinson's disease
- Dementia
- Incontinence
- Frailty
- Chronic lung disease and cardiovascular conditions.

Physiotherapists provide rehabilitation from surgeries including joint replacement, abdominal surgery and neurosurgery. They also work with residents and staff to manage chronic pain and behaviours related to dementia.



2,874
physiotherapists

55%
falls reduction



\$3.9^{BILL}
could be saved

Physiotherapy is the largest allied health profession in residential aged care. (21% of allied health workers in aged care or 2,874 out of over 13,600 are physiotherapists).

Falls prevention programs run by physiotherapists have been found to reduce the number of falls in residents by 55 per cent, including those living with dementia.

Up to \$3.9 billion of health spending could be saved annually, if physiotherapy-led falls prevention programs were implemented across residential aged care facilities.



How can physiotherapy help?

A physiotherapist can help you, or your loved one, living in aged care, in a number of ways, every day.

A typical day for a physiotherapist working in residential aged care starts by reviewing reports from the night staff and visiting with residents identified as needing assessment. If a resident has had a fall, a physiotherapist would assess the resident for injury, plan to reduce the risk of further falls, review mobility and offer relevant treatment.

When a new resident arrives, a physiotherapist would tailor a mobility care plan to them that enables staff to safely support that residents' movements.

Working with the nursing staff, physiotherapists regularly assess long-term residents to monitor aspects of their care such as pain management, mobility and arthritic oedema. Physiotherapists also work alongside care staff to develop manual handling plans to safely move residents which helps to prevent falls, injury and discomfort for residents.

Treatment

Physiotherapists working in residential aged care have historically been funded through the Aged Care Funding Instrument, which limits the treatment that physiotherapists can provide to only massage and the use of TENS machines. This is due to specific funding definitions surrounding the tool.

Physiotherapists have adapted to offer these specified treatments, as well as manual therapy, exercise and pain education – treatments that enable longer-lasting and more effective pain management for many residents.

Residents have good days in which they are more mobile and may be able to engage in activities such as gym programs and exercise classes. Other days, residents can experience downturns and struggle with self-motivation.

Physiotherapists take the time to talk to residents and understand their goals, enabling and assisting them to stay on their feet where possible, during both exercise and everyday activities.

Physiotherapists are best placed to offer informed care when they are in regular attendance at facilities and are familiar with residents' medical history, personality and usual level of function.

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