

**Submission  
No 9**

**12<sup>TH</sup> REVIEW OF THE EXERCISE OF THE FUNCTIONS OF  
THE MOTOR ACCIDENTS AUTHORITY**

**Organisation:** Australian Physiotherapy Association

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Legislative Council  
Parliament of New South Wales

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***Appropriate recognition of specialist and titled physiotherapists that provide high-quality healthcare***

The APA contends that specialist and titled physiotherapists are highly trained and their services should be more appropriately utilised by the Motor Accidents Authority (MAA) of NSW, as their specialist training enables them to better assess health conditions and injuries and provide specialised treatment to facilitate early recovery.

The APA contends that lack of recognition of particular treatment services places individual, highly-trained allied health providers at a competitive disadvantage.

Physiotherapists who provide specific treatment services, such as fitting custom orthotics or clinical Pilates, but who are not acknowledged for these services feel that their training and expertise are devalued. Lack of recognition is of special concern to titled and specialist physiotherapists who are highly educated and have a higher level of professional expertise.

The APA National Physiotherapy Service Descriptors for 2012 identify a Level 1 physiotherapist as an APA member, a Level 2 physiotherapist as an APA-titled member (clinical Masters degree or equivalent) and Level 3 a specialist physiotherapist as a practitioner who is a Fellow of the Australian College of Physiotherapy. These service descriptors clearly identify the increasing level of expertise within the physiotherapy profession. The service descriptors can be found here:

[http://www.physiotherapy.asn.au/DocumentsFolder/APAWCM/Resources/NationalPhysiotherapyServiceDescriptors\\_HR.pdf](http://www.physiotherapy.asn.au/DocumentsFolder/APAWCM/Resources/NationalPhysiotherapyServiceDescriptors_HR.pdf)

Indeed, evidence has clearly demonstrated that experienced physiotherapists have higher levels of knowledge in managing musculoskeletal conditions than medical students, physician interns and residents, and all physician specialists except for orthopaedists<sup>i</sup>. When magnetic resonance imaging (MRI) was used as the gold standard, the diagnostic accuracy of physiotherapists for clients with musculoskeletal injuries was found to be as good as that of orthopaedic surgeons and significantly better than that of non-orthopaedic providers<sup>ii</sup>.

If the MAA was to offer higher rebates to specialist and titled physiotherapists, the APA contends that higher rebates would not necessarily be at the financial expense of the compensable scheme long term. This is because highly trained specialist and titled physiotherapists are able to treat patients in a shorter amount of time and can return the patient to full function more quickly. The APA submits that chronic and complex compensable patients could benefit from treatment by titled and specialist physiotherapists and enjoy the benefit of improved treatment outcomes such as increased capacity, early recovery and reduced health costs.

If the MAA fails to recognise treatment services provided by specialist or titled physiotherapists and fails to rebate accordingly, there is a significant disincentive for specialist and titled physiotherapists to treat compensable patients. This is because specialists treating injured road users through the

MAA compensable scheme are precluded from charging above the standard fee mandated by the MAA fee schedule. If highly trained physiotherapists opt not to treat patients injured in motor vehicle accidents, such compensable patients have less access to quality or specialist treatment services through the MAA. This might impede patient recovery, as titled and specialist physiotherapists could achieve better treatment outcomes to patients in a shorter timeframe.

The APA contends that specialist and titled physiotherapists have better training and higher expertise and are able to achieve better treatment outcomes for patients in a shorter timeframe. The APA submits that specialist and titled physiotherapists should receive higher rebates for the specialised treatment services that they provide to injured road users. The APA believes that higher rebates for specialist and titled physiotherapists are unlikely to lead to increased costs for the MAA, as patients treated by a specialist or titled physiotherapist require fewer treatments overall to achieve recovery.

Yours faithfully,

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Senior Policy Officer

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<sup>1</sup> Weale, A.E. and G.C. Bannister, Who should see orthopaedic outpatients-physiotherapists or surgeons? *Ann R Coll Surg Engl*, 1995. 77: p. 71 - 73

<sup>ii</sup> Daker-White, G., et al., A randomised controlled trial. Shifting boundaries of doctors and physiotherapists in orthopaedic outpatient departments. *J Epidemiol Community Health*, 1999. 53: p. 643 - 650