



**Allied Health
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MEDIA RELEASE

Increased access to allied health is essential following COVID lockdowns in aged care

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Allied Health Professions Australia (AHPA) welcomes the Australian Government's announcement increasing Medicare-funded access to allied health services as part of its response to COVID-19 in residential aged care. Access to allied health in aged care continues to be a significant issue, as highlighted by the Aged Care Royal Commission and the COVID-19 pandemic has significantly increased the need for allied health services.

The emergency funding being made available through the MBS will allow aged care residents to access mental health services through the Better Access initiative for the first time. It will also support improved services under the Chronic Disease Management program and respond to the acute need to rebuild physical condition in many residents who have been confined during COVID-19.

"We know that during COVID-19 lockdowns, many older people living in aged care facilities have experienced a decline in cognitive function, physical capacity and communication skills, as well as an increase in depression and anxiety", said Claire Hewat, CEO of Allied Health Professions Australia. "These have been the results of social isolation which has disrupted routines, reduced physical activity and limited access to visitors."

"It's crucial that we address the impact of lockdowns on individuals as soon as possible. Getting older people moving again and supporting their mental wellbeing will make a big difference to their ongoing physical and mental health", she said. "Allied health professionals have an important role to play in this. As well as professions with specific mental health expertise, many allied health services help to improve physical and mental health through treatments that increase functional capacity and the ability to communicate."

As well as opening greater access to mental health services, the new interim MBS funding for initial assessments and extra sessions for allied health Chronic Disease Management services will also help to improve outcomes and support continuity of the care provided.

Funding for additional individual allied health sessions targeting physical strength and mobility, and funding through PHNs for group therapy in facilities directly affected by COVID-19 cases, will help rehabilitate older people who have lost condition due to lockdowns or may be recovering from the effects of the virus.

"Many aged care residents are frail and have complex issues, particularly those with dementia and chronic illnesses, and this has been exacerbated by the pandemic. Undoing the damage after COVID-19, both physical and mental, will require specific skills and therapies as well as time and reconnection with families."



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Allied health professionals are an important part of the aged care workforce. Greater access to allied health services is important for all aged care residents, even without the additional challenges of COVID-19. The government's additional funding for allied health services in mental health, chronic disease management and increasing physical capacity is an immediate and welcome response to the crisis situation. However, it is also an important step to acknowledging the long-term needs of older Australians and the essential role of allied health in providing person-centred care in aged care.

Claire Hewat is available for comment

About Allied Health Professions Australia

Allied Health Professions Australia (AHPA) is a collegiate body consisting of 19 national allied health association members and a further 11 affiliate members with close links to the allied health sector. AHPA's members collectively represent over 130,000 allied health professionals across a range of settings such as health, aged care, disability, social services, education and justice.

AHPA believes it is vital that allied health professionals are recognised for their work alongside the medical and nursing communities and for their potential to help shape and implement the health care system of the future. Supporting allied health professionals and making allied health services accessible will ensure that Australia has an integrated, comprehensive health care system which delivers world class care.

Please visit www.ahpa.com.au for further information about us.

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