

Physiotherapy New Zealand Election Briefing: Physiotherapists Are Ready to Support Effective Health Outcomes

The health system is under pressure; but there is a physiotherapy workforce ready, willing, and able to help. Physiotherapy New Zealand is calling on the incoming government to act on the evidence and fund physiotherapy in primary health.

Physiotherapists Add to Healthcare

Physiotherapy provides immediate benefit with an overall cost saving.

Physiotherapy practice is person and whānau centric; increasing individual and whānau empowerment to self-manage their health and wellbeing.

Physiotherapists are a highly skilled, trusted,¹ evidenced-based, young, and regulated workforce.²

By assisting General Practitioners workload, with one in four patient visits to a GP best managed by a Physiotherapist.³

Physiotherapy is a recommended first line treatment for osteoarthritis,⁴ musculoskeletal conditions,⁵ pelvic health conditions, and maintaining health in old age.

Physiotherapy has resulted in a 76 percent reduction in the number of people waiting more than a year for surgical treatment.⁶

Physiotherapy helps improve health before and after surgery.⁷

Physiotherapy helps recovery from Long Covid,⁸ cancer treatment,⁹ and mental health conditions.¹⁰

What Needs to Change?

Physiotherapy is currently not routinely funded in primary care, despite the evidence for its effectiveness. Health plans outline the importance of Physiotherapy but there remains no clear pathway for funding.

Physiotherapy New Zealand (PNZ)

PNZ is the national membership organisation for physiotherapists, physiotherapy assistants, and students, with over 4,500 members including 70% of registered physiotherapists in New Zealand. We support physiotherapists to lead improved health outcomes for Aotearoa, working with and advocating to stakeholders, as well as collaborating with others where our goals and values are aligned. To discuss this briefing please contact Physiotherapy New Zealand CEO Sandra Kirby on 021 397 169 or sandra.kirby@physiotherapy.org.nz.

¹ PNZ Public Survey report.

² Physiotherapy Board of New Zealand Annual Report 2022/23, physioboard.org.nz. The workforce is predominately female (76%); 30% of physiotherapists with a current APC are in the 35 to 44 age band.

³ Hidden In Plain Sight, NZIER report to Allied Health Aotearoa New Zealand (AHANZ), 2023, alliedhealth.org.nz.

⁴ Osteoarthritis Summit 2022, arthritis.org.nz.

⁵ Mobility Action Programme (MAP) 2017-2019 provided strong evidence that the MAP is an effective early intervention programme for people with MSK conditions. The MAP has resulted in health outcome gains for its participants, with the priority population groups achieving similar or better improvements in health status. Accessed from health.govt.nz.

⁶ More funding needed for people waiting in pain, Physiotherapy New Zealand media release, pnz.org.nz.

⁷ Planned care initiatives such as COTS programme in Bay of Plenty demonstrate effectiveness.

⁸ Time for Govt to put up money on Long Covid, newsroom.co.nz.

⁹ Brennan et al, 2022. Physical therapists in Oncology Settings, Physical Therapy, 102(3).

¹⁰ Firth et al, 2020. Redefining mental healthcare: Going multi-disciplinary to manage multimorbidity. Psychiatry Research, 284.

Physiotherapy New Zealand Election Briefing: Physiotherapy Supports Effective ACC Outcomes

Physiotherapists are a highly skilled, evidenced-based, trusted, and regulated workforce that delivers rehabilitation outcomes for all in Aotearoa.

Physiotherapy is critical for ACC success

More than one in four people who have an accident access ACC through a physiotherapist.¹¹

Physiotherapists are a highly skilled, trusted,¹² evidenced-based, young, and regulated workforce.¹³

Physiotherapy helps people recover from injury and return to work, family, and sporting life. It has been shown that physiotherapists deliver strong outcomes for people recovering from injury at relatively low cost within our communities, saving tertiary services significant cost.

Most physiotherapists in private practice are delivering ACC services.

ACC funding has not kept pace with costs of treatment delivery. Physiotherapists are leaving the profession due to low salary (a result of poor ACC funding), with physiotherapy funded well below professions with similar training, such as nurses and teachers.

The need to charge an ACC copayment magnifies inequity, particularly for Māori, Pacific, and rural patients.

A law change in 2022 gave access to ACC funding for women experiencing birth injuries but barriers such as copayments remain.

Physiotherapists provide treatment but cannot sign off return to work certificates, putting pressure on General Practitioners and families for an appointment to simply sign the certificate.

What needs to change?

PNZ is calling for ACC funding rates to meet the real cost of treatment and ensure a sustainable workforce, attractive enough to retain experienced staff.

Including:

- Full funding for community services card holders, with removal of the copayment requirement.
- A change to ACC legislation to allow physiotherapists to sign work capacity certificates.
- Significant improvement to the assisted recovery service to support recovery for kiritaki.
- Injury prevention funding increase for sporting, work, and home related injuries.
- Better utilisation of Specialist and Advanced practitioner physiotherapy roles with a review of their funding rates.

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¹¹ Those injured can access ACC directly through physiotherapy. 25% of all ACC claims are made through a physiotherapist.

¹² PNZ Public Survey report.

¹³ Physiotherapy Board of New Zealand Annual Report 2022/23, physioboard.org.nz. The workforce is predominately female (76%); 30% of physiotherapists with a current APC are in the 35 to 44 age band.