

## Sharing the care: getting to know your team



AUSTRALIAN  
PHYSIOTHERAPY  
ASSOCIATION

### Paediatric physiotherapy

Physiotherapists working within paediatrics provide therapy to children of all ages and diagnoses, across a vast range of areas including:

- gross motor
- fine motor
- neurological
- infant patterns of movement or primitive reflexes
- sensory motor
- musculoskeletal
- cardiorespiratory
- chronic childhood conditions.

Paediatric physiotherapy is an evidence-based profession that adopts current research guidelines to deliver optimal therapy to clients.

Management is always goal directed and family-centred aiming to enhance the child's participation and quality of life across all domains from home and family life to community, school and sport engagement.

#### About physiotherapy

Physiotherapists are practitioners who are highly trained in treating and preventing a wide range of health conditions to help improve quality of life and encourage a healthy lifestyle. They provide tailored exercise and treatment programs for all members of the community—young or old, fit or challenged.

Physiotherapy can help improve general health and wellbeing in many ways. Beyond the more commonly known treatments for sports and muscular injuries, there are many different areas of physiotherapy.



#### Referral information

Depending on where you work, a referral to a paediatric physiotherapist can be as easy as providing your patient with a letter indicating the reason for referral and then encouraging them to source a paediatric physiotherapist near their home.

Pathways for referral include:

- MBS chronic disease team care arrangement
- Private health cover
- Public health child development service  
<https://www.childrens.health.qld.gov.au/chq/our-services/community-health-services/child-development-program/>

Paediatric physiotherapists often collaborate with multi-professional teams including GPs, teachers, coaches, paediatricians, neurologists, and dietitians.

Find a private practice physiotherapist and patient information about how physiotherapy can help them manage a range of conditions: [www.choose.physio](http://www.choose.physio)



This activity is supported by funding from the Australian Government under the PHN Program

## Costs

Although a referral is not required, it is helpful and may be necessary to obtain certain funding. Funding is available for children and families dependent on the child's presentation and diagnosis. This can include schemes such as the National Disability Insurance Scheme (NDIS), federal funding through Medicare, Department of Education and private health cover. A physiotherapist will guide families on the best options to fully or partly fund physiotherapy services where eligible.

Patients with complex chronic conditions can access a Team Care Arrangement which may include an out of pocket expense (Medicare rebate is \$52.95 as at June 2018).

It is important to talk to your patient's carer about possible gap fees and that they may not receive 'five free allied health visits' through their Team Care Arrangement. Out of pocket costs will vary depending on the provider, so explaining this when formulating the Team Care Arrangement and making the referral will avoid any unexpected costs for the patient.

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## Gross and fine motor

Children with poor quality of movement or difficulty mastering motor skills in line with their typically developing peers would benefit from physiotherapy assessment. Physiotherapy can then further explore the causes of these motor problems. Physiotherapists are trained in assessing fine motor skills to determine if a child can perform at an age appropriate level.

Physiotherapists approach fine motor management differently from colleagues in occupational therapy highlighting the benefit for multi-professional management when required.

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## Posture and balance

Balance and postural skills are important as they give children the stability that is necessary to both learn and develop motor skills. Children who frequently trip or fall, or have troubles standing or sitting steady and still, such that it impacts on their daily functioning, should be referred to a paediatric physiotherapist.

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## Neurological

Physiotherapy can also support children with a range of neurological problems. Differences in quality of movement, stiffness or floppiness, as well as any asymmetry in movement would warrant a visit to a physiotherapist working in paediatrics.

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## Infant patterns of movement or primitive reflexes

Physiotherapists can assess, identify and manage the persistence of infant patterns of movement. Examples of presentations can include children walking on their toes or adopting postures that reflect the persistence of a particular infant pattern.



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## Sensory motor

In addition to being experts in movement analysis, paediatric physiotherapists can both assess and treat the ocular-motor, vestibular, tactile, proprioceptive, auditory, and motor planning systems in order to understand the impact these systems are having on the child's presentation.

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## Musculoskeletal

In adult care, it is common knowledge that physiotherapists are experts in managing musculoskeletal anomalies and injuries. This is consistent in paediatrics. When abnormal postures or alignments of bones are found such as in-toeing gait, physiotherapists can assess the muscle and bony systems with the aim to enhance function. Physiotherapists' area of expertise spans from problems identified at birth, to musculoskeletal injuries or trauma sustained during childhood, or even malalignments that arise with growth such as scoliosis.

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## Continence

Children who have problems with their bladder and bowels such as a school-age child still wetting during the day or at night, or soiling in their underwear, having recurrent urinary tract infections or even constipation will benefit from paediatric assessment and non-invasive treatment.

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## Cardiorespiratory

Children who suffer from obesity, have poor fitness, or have been diagnosed with either an acute or chronic respiratory condition have been shown to benefit from physiotherapy intervention.

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## Chronic childhood conditions

Physiotherapists working within paediatrics can even assist children who have chronic conditions such as cancer. Physiotherapy may be required for management and control of symptoms, prevention of secondary complications, while aiming to improve both quality of life and functioning. Physiotherapists can also play a role in palliative care.



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Paediatric physiotherapists support children from birth through to adulthood working collaboratively with many different health professionals to optimise a child's functioning, quality of life, access and participation in play, sport, education, and occupation.

In order to address an array of symptoms, physiotherapists who work within paediatrics come equipped with a variety of evidence-based modalities including:

- hydrotherapy
- orthotics and equipment prescription
- exercise based treatment
- casting
- hands-on treatment options
- education and advocacy roles.

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### Further information

- Australian Physiotherapy Association. [www.choose.physio](http://www.choose.physio)  
Visit the website to find a physio and to access information for patients about how physiotherapy can help them manage a range of conditions
- Queensland Government. Child Development Program.  
<https://www.childrens.health.qld.gov.au/chq/our-services/community-health-services/child-development-program/>
- Queensland Government. Children's health fact sheets  
<https://www.childrens.health.qld.gov.au/chq/health-professionals/fact-sheets/>
- Queensland Government. Red Flags Early Identification Guide (for children aged birth to five years). Second Edition <https://www.childrens.health.qld.gov.au/wp-content/uploads/PDF/red-flags.pdf>
- National Disability Insurance Scheme (NDIS). <https://www.ndis.gov.au/>

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### Your feedback

The video series that accompanies this fact sheet has been developed to assist health professionals to increase their knowledge and awareness of the many diverse allied health disciplines, sub-specialties, and referral pathways in primary care to improve patient outcomes in our community.

If you have any questions or feedback please email: [alliedhealth@bspn.org.au](mailto:alliedhealth@bspn.org.au)

