

Sharing the care: getting to know your team



Exercise physiology and mental health

Accredited Exercise Physiologists (AEP) have experience and expertise in the assessment, design and delivery of exercise and behaviour change interventions. This includes working with those living with, or at risk of chronic conditions, including mental illness.

AEPs represent a growing workforce within the mental health sector. Despite the increasing evidence supporting exercise interventions within targeted mental health settings, AEPs remain an underutilised resource. The inclusion of AEPs as part of the multidisciplinary mental health team will lead to improved physical and mental health outcomes for people with mental illness.

About exercise physiology

An AEP is university qualified to provide evidence-based exercise interventions. AEPs work in a range of settings including hospitals, health services, community health centres and in private practice. An AEP may be utilised in a proactive manner to avoid the onset of chronic health conditions and to treat chronic and complex conditions and injuries.

With a strong awareness of the holistic role a multi-disciplinary approach to health care should take, AEPs regularly work alongside GPs, specialists, nurses, psychologists, psychiatrists, occupational therapists, physiotherapists, dietitians, speech pathologists, diabetes educators, and many other community based roles to ensure well rounded guidance for the patient.



Referral information

Referral to an AEP can occur at any time; preventatively, post operatively, and in conjunction with other allied health treatments.

Pathways for referral include:

- MBS chronic disease team care arrangement (up to 5 allied health services per calendar year)
- Private health cover

Find a private practice AEP

The best way to find an AEP is through the national ESSA website where you can filter your search by postcode and specialty, such as mental health.

www.essa.org.au/find-aep/

An AEP is an evidence based practitioner who is able to ensure your patients move safely towards better physical and mental health.



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

Costs

Funding options vary depending on the clinic, private health fund type and level of coverage. When referring a patient, it is important to talk to them about possible out of pocket costs and that they may not receive 'five free allied health visits'. Patients accessing services through a Team Care Arrangement will receive a Medicare rebate of \$52.95 as at June 2018.

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 disappointment or unexpected costs for the patient.

Why AEPs for mental health?

- Exercise has a growing base of evidence that supports positive outcomes for people struggling with depression and other mental health concerns.
- Exercise is an effective therapeutic approach to assist the individual with managing side effects of medication.
- People with mental illness have high rates of obesity and lifestyle-related diseases.

People with mental illness experience poorer physical health with fifty percent of Australians experiencing mental illness at some point in their life. People with severe mental illness live between 10-32 years less than the general population.

Research into mental health and exercise has been ongoing since the 1980's. In a 2014 review of 4 meta-analyses focusing on exercise and depression, they found that exercise intervention outcomes were comparable to antidepressant medication and psychotherapy, and that exercise as a complimentary therapy assists in the treatment of severe depression.

A referral to an AEP results in the use of motivational interviewing techniques to support behaviour change. AEPs are able to assist patients in the areas of motivation, weight loss in the face of complex conditions, education on sleep behaviours and overall quality of life. This includes social and occupational functioning, allowing for the important component of social inclusion into a patient's treatment program.

Further information

- Exercise and Sports Science Australia (ESSA). Consensus statement on the role of accredited exercise physiologists within the treatment of mental health disorders https://www.essa.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2015/10/Consensus-statement-on-the-role-of-Accredited-Exercise-Physiologists-within-the-treatment-of-mental-disorders-for-mental-health-professionals_v8.pdf
- Exercise is Medicine consumer fact sheets <http://exerciseismedicine.com.au/>

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@bsphn.org.au

