

23 June 2021

Senator Rachel Siewert, Chair
Senate Standing Committees on Community Affairs
PO Box 6100
Parliament House
Canberra ACT 2600

Submitted online: https://www.apa.gov.au/Parliamentary_Business/Committees/OnlineSubmission

Dear Senator,

Re Inquiry into the purpose, intent and adequacy of the Disability Support Pension (DSP)
Submission by the Australian Physiotherapy Association

The Australian Physiotherapy Association (APA) welcomes the opportunity to provide feedback on the purpose, intent and adequacy of the Disability Support Pension (DSP) to the Senate Community Affairs References Committee.

About the APA

The APA is the peak body representing the interests of Australian physiotherapists and their patients. It is a national organisation with state and territory branches and specialty subgroups representing more than 29,000 physiotherapists who conduct more than 23 million consultations each year.

The APA's vision is that all Australians will have access to quality physiotherapy, when and where required, to optimise health and wellbeing.

Physiotherapy and Disability

Physiotherapy is a highly regulated discipline with specialist knowledge, skills and training in understanding how people move and learn to move, and the development of movement, specifically, as these relate to the health, well-being and quality of life of people of all ages. Physiotherapists are trained in the biomechanics of movement, combining knowledge of physics, physiology and anatomy to analyse movement and determine movement difficulties.

Physiotherapists are movement and participation experts in disability who specialise in improving function, participation and building capacity. Physiotherapists analyse an individual's quality of movement, identify motor impairment, and investigate the interrelationship between movement and other neurological and physiological factors such as sensory perception and pain.

Physiotherapists are committed to providing expert, evidence-based, safe and high-quality care to people with disability and contributing to an effective and equitable disability sector.

An appropriate level of physiotherapy can promote social inclusion through optimising a person's function and encouraging participation in the economic and social life of the community.

Participation is however dependent on a number of factors including:

- Equitable access to health care and rehabilitation services
- Optimal access to aids and equipment essential for function
- Environmental access, including appropriate transport
- **Access to suitable employment**, including appropriate environment and supports
- **Adequate income support**
- Access to appropriate education, and

- Access to appropriate accommodation.

The Disability Support Pension (DSP)

- Benefits

The APA supports incentives provided for engagement in paid work and reiterates that incentives with appropriate supports encourage people to work. The immediate benefits of income support is to unlock access to critical health support, such as physiotherapy, that can otherwise be out of reach because of high out-of-pocket costs for the patients.

- Eligibility

Physiotherapists are regularly engaged in work capacity assessments and have had the opportunity to work with the Impairment Tables. The APA contends that the Impairment Tables should include specific, evidence-based assessments of function and ability, using criteria that are aligned to the International Classification of Functioning, Disability and Health (ICF). Physiotherapists work within the ICF framework to provide evidence-based therapeutic interventions of high quality that seek to build on the individual's strengths, and address impairment or problems relating to activity and participation within the relevant environment. Using the ICF descriptors, specific criteria can be implemented to design an accurate and reliable assessment tool that is relevant to contemporary practice.

Accordingly, the APA will contribute to the Department of Social Services Review of the Disability Support Pension (DSP) Impairment Tables that will close on 31 July 2021.

- Adequacy

Support payments are critical to enable and enhance people with disability's participation in the economic and social life of the community. For the pension to be adequate, it needs to take into consideration:

- Decent level of living;
- Higher needs (than the overall population) in terms of accessing adequate housing;
- Higher needs (than the overall population) in terms of accessing health support services such as physiotherapy.

The DSP shouldn't be looked at in isolation but in conjunction with all kind of support that is (or not) available to people with living with disability.

The APA firmly believes that the involvement of the physiotherapy profession is critical considering the involvement of physiotherapists in job capacity assessments, and will ensure that any review will result in a fairer and more accurate system that will improve accessibility of the Disability Support Pension for Australians who genuinely need its support. We would welcome the opportunity to provide further evidence to the Committee.

The APA contact is: General Manager Policy and Government Relations, Simon Tatz, on 0402 613 745 or simon.tatz@australian.physio.

Yours sincerely,

Anja Nikolic
Chief Executive Officer