

New Guidelines for provision of physiotherapy in aged care in New Zealand

Providing the best care for older people living in ARC, who have diverse functional abilities, health needs and cognitive function is challenging?

from Aged Care New Zealand Issue 1 2022

Physiotherapy New Zealand (PNZ) is soon to release the first NZ guidelines for Aged Residential Care (ARC) managers on the benefits and utilisation of physiotherapy services in ARC, developed by members of the Physiotherapy for the Older Adult Special Interest Group of PNZ.

The provision of physiotherapy services in ARC has long been unclear with the contractual requirements being 'grey' at best. These guidelines aim to provide managers with information around the immense benefits of a robust and effective physiotherapy service, and the 'how to' of selecting and planning high quality physiotherapy services for their residents.

Mobility and independent function are highly valued by older people and their whanau and are essential to the wellbeing and health related quality of life of older people.



Aged Residential Care is a vital part of our health system where over 50 percent of all individuals will stay for some of their lives. Some people will live in ARC for up to five years or longer, and those years spent living in ARC, can be a very meaningful experience for an older person.

Providing the best care for older people living in ARC, who have diverse functional abilities, health needs, and cognitive function, is challenging. Utilising physiotherapy allows facilities to support their resident's physical functioning, enable their well-being, rehabilitate them from injury and illness, manage long term conditions, and delay the onset of frailty and disability.

The newly developed guidelines include:

- The background and importance of physiotherapy
- When physiotherapy input is recommended – what should trigger a referral
- How much and how often physiotherapy should be provided to residents
- Safe, effective, and legal use of physiotherapy assistants
- Facilitating access to privately funded physiotherapy for individual
- Moving and handling training for staff
- How to select a physiotherapist to work an ARC facility
- Documentation standards and processes
- Setting up a physiotherapy service in an ARC

These guidelines have been needed for many years. A report to Physiotherapy New Zealand on physiotherapy services.

The report outlined inadequate provision of physiotherapy service and examples of physiotherapy assistants working without supervision of a physiotherapist. In 2022

physiotherapists see extreme variation in the provision of physiotherapy, ranging from 20 + hours per week right down to hospital level care facilities with no weekly physiotherapy provision.

The urgency for these guidelines was highlighted in the initial response to Covid 19 when New Zealand moved to Alert levels 3 and 4 in 2020 and the country went into lockdown. Huge variation in access to physiotherapy services was seen across the country. Although many facilities engaged with telehealth there were some ARC facilities who did not engage with physiotherapy services at all. On the return of physiotherapy services to facilities there were numerous cases of irreversible loss of mobility and function in residents over the two-month period.

These guidelines will not just inform managers but will also be an essential guideline allowing more informed consumers to ask appropriate questions when selecting their ARC facility. Generally, physiotherapy services are listed on Eldernet as “yes/no” with limited information on the physiotherapy services provided.

These guidelines will give consumers the understanding to ask detailed questions about hours of physiotherapy each week, what can be expected in terms of assessment and input for themselves or their whanau and allow them to understand how the provision of a robust physiotherapy service can improve their experience of ARC living.

Ref: Aged Care NZ, Issue 01 2022
Physiotherapy NZ Older Adult

If you are interested in receiving a copy of these guidelines when they are released, please contact pnz@physiotherapy.org.nz

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