



AUSTRALIAN
PHYSIOTHERAPY
ASSOCIATION

APA Code of Conduct

SEPTEMBER 2008

APA Vision

All Australians will have access to quality physiotherapy, when and where required, to optimise health and well-being.

Preamble

Physiotherapy is a profession with a holistic approach to the prevention, diagnosis and therapeutic management of conditions affecting human movement. The practice of physiotherapy is based on contemporary scientific evidence.

Physiotherapy includes a range of specialties to meet the health needs of people of all ages. Physiotherapy involves a partnership with clients to achieve better health outcomes.

Physiotherapy offers health care in many different settings including private practice, hospitals, community health centres, aged care facilities, industry and clients' own homes.

Australian physiotherapists are registered health professionals with university degree qualifications. They are primary contact practitioners who work independently and also within multidisciplinary health teams.

The Australian Physiotherapy Association (APA) is the peak national body representing the physiotherapy profession in Australia. Physiotherapists, physiotherapy students and physiotherapy assistants are eligible for membership of the APA.

All members of the APA are expected to participate in continuing professional development. Some physiotherapist members

undertake a formal specialisation pathway and are recognised as 'titled' members of the APA or with further experience and education as specialists or Fellows of the Australian College of Physiotherapists.

The APA Code of Conduct establishes the basis for ethical and professional conduct which meets community expectations and justifies community trust in the standing, judgement and integrity of APA members. The Code is reviewed on a regular basis in consultation with a wide range of stakeholders including consumer bodies.

Ethical Principles

The following ethical principles are the foundation of the APA Code of Conduct:

- **Respect the rights and autonomy of the individual**
- **Cause no harm**
- **Advance the common good**
- **Act fairly.**

Interpretation

All nine principles in the APA Code of Conduct are binding on all APA members.

Guidance points are provided to help APA members understand and uphold each of the nine principles that constitute the Code. Not every guidance point in the Code will apply to all types of members in all circumstances. Guidance points are intended as an illustration of conduct that upholds a particular principle. Guidance points are not intended to be deemed binding on every member of the Association in all circumstances.

The guidance should not be seen as exhaustive or limiting the scope of the Code. Further guidance material is available to APA members on the APA website including guidelines on informed consent, suggested procedures for managing complaints and APA Standards for Physiotherapy Practices. Additional guidance material, such as the relevant registration Act and the Australian Charter of Healthcare Rights, is readily available in the public domain.

Conduct or behaviour not in accordance with the nine principles of the APA Code of Conduct constitutes a breach of the Code.

Where a complaint that alleges a breach of the APA Code of Conduct falls within the jurisdiction of a statutory authority such as a Physiotherapists Registration Board, Health Complaints Commissioner or the Courts, the APA expects the complaint to be investigated independently by that authority. The APA does not investigate any complaints that are deemed to fall within the jurisdiction of a statutory authority. The Association considers rulings made by statutory authorities to assess an individual's eligibility for APA membership.

In certain circumstances, the Association considers alleged breaches of the APA Code of Conduct that are deemed to fall outside the jurisdiction of a statutory authority.

Where the Code of Conduct mentions the term 'individual' or 'client', this may also be interpreted to include any other responsible person such as a carer, parent or guardian according to the circumstances. In the domain of animal physiotherapy, the terms may be interpreted to mean an animal.

Where guidance points use the term 'members' this means the guidance applies to all three types of APA members – physiotherapists, physiotherapy students and physiotherapy assistants. Where the guidance material applies uniquely to physiotherapists, this is clearly indicated.

APA members facing difficult ethical situations are encouraged to seek advice from colleagues.

Code of Conduct

Members of the Australian Physiotherapy Association must uphold the nine principles of the APA Code of Conduct.

1. **APA members must respect the rights, needs and dignity of all individuals.**
2. **APA members must comply with the laws and regulations governing the practice of physiotherapy in Australia.**
3. **APA members must practise in a safe, competent and accountable manner.**
4. **APA members must strive for standards of excellence in physiotherapy.**
5. **APA members must respect the confidentiality, privacy and security of client health information.**
6. **APA members must communicate and co-operate with colleagues and relevant agencies in the best interests of their clients and the wider community.**
7. **APA members must act in a manner which maintains the good standing of the physiotherapy profession.**
8. **APA members must strive to contribute to the development and implementation of health service delivery which enhances the health status of the community and promotes social justice.**
9. **APA members must comply with the Constitution and Regulations of the Australian Physiotherapy Association.**

1 APA members must respect the rights, needs and dignity of all individuals.

- Members shall not deny people access to physiotherapy on the basis of age, gender, ethnicity, beliefs, sexual preference or health status.
- Members shall respect people's individuality.
- Members shall offer privacy that meets a client's individual needs.
- Members shall establish respectful partnerships with clients to promote a sense of mutual responsibility for achieving optimal health outcomes.
- Members shall provide a reasonable level of information to clients about the benefits, risks and costs of intervention options to enable clients to provide informed consent to a physiotherapy program.
- Where a client is unable to make an informed decision about a physiotherapy program, members shall seek informed consent from an appropriate person acting on behalf of the client.
- Members shall respect the right of clients to obtain a second opinion or cease physiotherapy.
- Members shall manage client complaints in a professional, sensitive and timely manner.
- Members shall not exploit their professional relationships with clients.
- Members shall not engage in any sexual activity with a person who is a current client.
- Members shall not engage in any sexual activity with a person who is a former client where such activity would constitute exploitation of a professional relationship.

2 APA members must comply with the laws and regulations governing the practice of physiotherapy in Australia.

- Members shall have a full understanding of the laws and regulations relevant to physiotherapy in Australia.

3 APA members must practise in a safe, competent and accountable manner.

- Members shall define their scope of physiotherapy practice based on contemporary knowledge and competency standards and shall accept responsibility for the exercise of sound judgement.
- Members shall incorporate safety and risk management into all aspects of physiotherapy practice.
- Members shall provide physiotherapy services that are clinically justifiable.
- Members shall use available health care resources appropriately.

- Physiotherapists shall keep a legible and accurate health record for every client to allow for the effective evaluation of a client's progress or status, and the provision of medico-legal information as required.
- Physiotherapists shall accept responsibility for all physiotherapy provided by others acting under their supervision.
- Physiotherapists shall not delegate any activity which requires the unique knowledge, competence or judgement of a physiotherapist.
- Members shall communicate effectively in the delegation of physiotherapy interventions.
- Members shall communicate effectively in the delivery of physiotherapy interventions.
- Members have the right to refuse to provide a physiotherapy service where there are reasonable grounds for doing so.
- Members shall accept responsibility for their own physical and psychological wellbeing to protect their professional knowledge, competence and judgement.
- Members shall participate in continuing professional development to enhance their professional knowledge, competence and judgement.
- Members shall have appropriate and adequate professional indemnity insurance.

4 APA members must strive for standards of excellence in physiotherapy.

- Members shall demonstrate a commitment to lifelong learning.
- Members shall participate in peer review and program evaluation for the purpose of continuous quality improvement in physiotherapy practice, management, leadership, education, research and health promotion.
- Members shall be aware of contemporary research evidence and integrate such evidence into physiotherapy practice.
- Members shall support research which contributes to effective and cost efficient physiotherapy outcomes.
- Members shall abide by the rules governing the ethical conduct of research and be generous in sharing their learning.

5 APA members must respect the confidentiality, privacy and security of client health information.

- Members shall protect the confidentiality and privacy of client health information including clinical information, clinical opinion, personal information generally and practical details such as attendance for treatment.
- Physiotherapists shall ensure that all people working under their supervision respect the confidentiality and privacy of client health information.

- Members shall not disclose any health information about a client to a third party without the client's permission, unless such disclosure is required or permissible by law.
- Members shall respect a client's right under privacy legislation to access their own health information on request.
- Members shall ensure that clients' health records are held securely for at least the period required by law.

6 APA members must communicate and co-operate with colleagues and relevant agencies in the best interests of their clients and the wider community.

- Members shall provide accurate information about physiotherapy to professional colleagues, clients and the wider community.
- Members shall collaborate professionally with all relevant providers to achieve optimal client outcomes.
- Members shall refer clients to more suitably qualified colleagues and/or other health professionals as reasonably required.
- Members shall be alert to the possibility of non-accidental injury to an adult or child and shall consider and act upon their legal and ethical obligations in such circumstances.

7 APA members must act in a manner which maintains the good standing of the physiotherapy profession.

- Members shall conduct themselves both professionally and personally in a manner that enhances the integrity, culture and standing of the physiotherapy profession.
- Members shall not be associated or involved with conduct which may bring the physiotherapy profession into disrepute and shall make reasonable efforts to refer evidence of such conduct to the relevant authorities.
- Members shall use only titles which correctly describe their professional status, expertise or scope of practice.
- Only Fellows of the Australian College of Physiotherapists are entitled to use the term 'Specialist' or any of its derivatives.
- Members shall apply fair, reasonable and honest business principles when dealing with clients and others.
- Members shall attribute an appropriate value to their services when determining any fee and shall account for special circumstances.
- Members shall not make commitments which have the potential to produce a conflict of interest with their professional integrity, clinical independence or primary obligation to clients.
- Members shall not sell, supply, endorse or promote services or goods in ways which exploit their professional relationships with clients.

- Members shall not denigrate professional colleagues.
- Members shall support the health and well being of colleagues.
- Members advertising their services shall provide accurate information and shall not make false, misleading or deceptive claims.
- Members shall not undermine the safety, quality, practice, standards or professional standing of physiotherapy when teaching physiotherapy skills, and shall consider the public interest.
- Physiotherapists shall not exploit or abuse colleagues, students or physiotherapy assistants during supervision or mentoring.
- Physiotherapists shall share professional knowledge and expertise with colleagues and students and shall provide positive role models to build successive generations of the physiotherapy profession.

8 APA members must strive to contribute to the development and implementation of health service delivery which enhances the health status of the community and promotes social justice.

- Physiotherapists shall participate in the planning and implementation of health service delivery designed to provide equitable access to quality health care and achieve optimal health outcomes for local communities.
- Physiotherapists shall encourage the innovative extension of the scope of physiotherapy practice where such development is based on evidence of efficacy and safety.
- Members shall integrate health promotion activities into physiotherapy practice.
- Members shall support research which contributes to effective and cost efficient community health outcomes.
- Members shall participate in public education programs to explain the scope, efficacy and cost efficiency of physiotherapy intervention.

9 APA members must comply with the Constitution and Regulations of the Australian Physiotherapy Association.

- Members shall have a full understanding of the Constitution and Regulations of the Australian Physiotherapy Association.