22 September 2014

Hon David Davis MP
Minister for Health
Level 22, 50 Lonsdale St
MELBOURNE VIC 3000

Dear Minister,

The Australian Physiotherapy Association represents more than 4,100 Victorian physiotherapists and over 16,500 Australia wide. Physiotherapists work across the whole spectrum of the health sector, including public/private hospitals and clinics, community health and private practices. Physiotherapists also work in specialist areas including neurology, women’s health, paediatrics, cardiorespiratory, rehabilitation and musculoskeletal.

Our members have identified the priority areas for physiotherapy, and are seeking commitments on these issues from the Australian Labor Party, the Liberal Party and the Greens as a component of our 2014 Victorian election advocacy.

The issues and their corresponding questions are as follows:

**Advanced and Extended Scope of Practice for Physiotherapists**

Q. Will the Liberal Party continue its commitment to develop advanced and extended scope of practice roles by supporting Victorian health services to expand advanced musculoskeletal physiotherapy roles into clinics focused on orthopaedics, emergency departments, post-operative joint replacement, neurosurgery, and rheumatology?

**Recognition of Skills and Training**

Q. Does the Liberal Party support direct referrals to selected medical specialist services?

Q. Does the Liberal Party support in principle limited prescribing rights for appropriately credentialed physiotherapists?

**Public Sector Career Pathways for Physiotherapists**

Q. Does the Liberal Party commit to recognition of experienced, post-graduate qualified physiotherapists working in the public system through appropriate remuneration?

Q. Will the Liberal Party commit to reviewing employment arrangements of public sector physiotherapists to provide for more opportunities for career advancement and recognition?

**Physiotherapy Access**

Q. Will the Liberal Party commit to increasing access and reducing waiting lists for physiotherapy services in Victorian hospitals, country health and community health settings?

**Community Health Parity**

Q. Will the Liberal Party commit to ensuring that there is sufficient funding so that community health physiotherapists have wage parity and career pathway opportunities in line with physiotherapists in the Victorian public health system and/or their colleagues – such as dieticians?
Stroke Rehabilitation
Q. Will the Liberal Party commit to providing increase rehabilitation services to allow stroke survivors to access appropriate rehabilitation?

Children with Mild to Moderate Disabilities
Q. Will the Liberal Government commit to ensuring, throughout the roll-out period and transition to NDIS, children with disabilities will continue to be able to access the government subsidised services they require until such time as they are registered with the NDIS?

Victorian WorkCover Authority (VWA) and Transport Accident Commission (TAC)
Q. Will the Liberal Party commit to support the further development of the Early Intervention Physiotherapy Framework (EIPF), a new model for managing the treatment and services for injured workers and TAC clients?

A brief summary on each of the above issues are attached with this letter.

The responses received by Wednesday, 22 October 2014, will be emailed unedited to our 4100 Branch members, to provide them with the views of the parties pertaining to physiotherapy. Please limit your responses to 750 words and do not hesitate to ask for more information by telephoning the Victorian Branch on 9092 0899 or emailing our Regional Manager at cindy.higgins@physiotherapy.asn.au.

Thank you for your time and consideration of our questions and we look forward to receiving the Liberal Party response.

I would also like the opportunity to meet with you or the respective portfolio spokesperson after the election to further discuss the issues we have raised with the Liberal Party and will therefore be in touch again in due course.

Yours sincerely,

Bridget Shaw
President Victorian Branch
Australian Physiotherapy Association
Advanced and Extended Scope of Practice for Physiotherapists

There are already a number of advanced practice and/or extended scope roles being provided by physiotherapists in the public hospital system across Australia, and there remains much potential for increasing and developing these further.

Existing roles for physiotherapists include physiotherapists in Emergency Departments, spinal assessment, orthopaedic and post-arthroplasty clinics. In these roles, physiotherapists have demonstrated they are competent, cost effective and improve patient access, care and outcomes. Future tasks could potentially involve prescription of pharmaceuticals, injection procedures and direct referral to medical specialists. These advancements have been seen to be extremely beneficial to the effective patient journey across the world.

Q. Will the Liberal Party continue its commitment to develop advanced and extended scope of practice roles by supporting Victorian health services to scope and introduce advanced musculoskeletal physiotherapy roles into clinics focused on orthopaedics, emergency departments, post-operative joint replacement, neurosurgery, and rheumatology?

Workforce

Recognition of Skills and Training

Within the primary health care context, physiotherapists provide treatment as first contact practitioners. They can effectively assist with provision of primary health care with savings accruing from hospital avoidance, by adequate and appropriate service provision across the public / private sectors.

The APA nationally through its 2014-15 Federal Pre budget Submission (available from physiotherapy.asn.au/submissions) is campaigning for direct referrals to selected medical specialist services and limited prescribing rights to streamline the patient journey and reduce costs. Governments around the country will be asked to recognise and support this.

Late last year, Health Workforce Australia released an excellent piece of work call Health Professionals Prescribing Pathway (HPPP), to allow for the development of protocols that allow physiotherapists and health professions other than doctors to follow a rigorous and competency based program to become competent to prescribe medications.

The APA strongly supports the HPPP, which has been endorsed by the Australian Health Ministers’ Advisory Council (AHMAC). We believe that the physiotherapy profession is one of the key professions to take up the task of prescribing medications and contribute to the improvements to health workforce productivity and flexibility that are vital if the workforce is to meet the growing demand for healthcare across the state.

Q. Does the Liberal Party support direct referrals to selected medical specialist services?

Q. Does the Liberal Party support in principle limited prescribing rights for appropriately credentialed physiotherapists?
Public Sector Careers
Within the Public sector setting, the APA would like an assurance that physiotherapists will be able to maintain services to the community in an efficient and effective manner.

All areas of the public health system consistently have difficulty in recruiting and retaining experienced staff due to the limitations of a flat career structure and limited mechanisms for physiotherapists with post graduate qualifications, research or experience in advanced practice to be remunerated to reflect that. High turnover of staff costs the system. The lack of recognition also results in a disproportionate number of physiotherapists in the public system being junior, or having less than three years experience.

Short term contracts in public hospitals also hamper the ability to attract and retain needed health professionals in areas of growing demand.

If the Victorian health system adequately recognised the skills, training, education and experience of physiotherapists by providing a career path and remuneration for senior clinicians, retention would not be such a problem. Increased numbers of advanced and extended scope physiotherapy jobs in specifically funded services would not only enhance Victorian health care, but also achieve savings accrued from better utilisation of physiotherapists skills.

Q. Does the Liberal Party commit to recognition of experienced, post-graduate qualified physiotherapists working in the public system through appropriate remuneration?

Q. Will the Liberal Party commit to reviewing employment arrangements of public sector physiotherapists to provide for more opportunities for career advancement and recognition?

Physiotherapy Access
There has been ongoing public acknowledgement that Allied Health, including physiotherapy at existing Victorian hospitals is chronically underfunded with resultant workforce shortages and extensive patient waiting lists.

In addition, country Victoria has the greatest gaps in physiotherapy service access for the public. Physiotherapy funding and recruitment and retention issues are a real concern throughout country health in Victoria.

Community health is another glaring deficit for physiotherapy with minimal services. The overall lack of physiotherapy services in community health settings across Victoria limits the ability to manage patients with chronic disease such as arthritis, diabetes, osteoporosis and respiratory disease in the community. There are lengthy waiting lists even for acute conditions. This will continue to place additional demands on all existing hospital outpatient services, until alternative physiotherapy services are provided at community health centres.

Q. Will the Liberal Party commit to increasing access and reducing waiting lists for physiotherapy services in Victorian hospitals, country health and community health settings?
**Community Health Parity**
Physiotherapists that work in Community Health are the worst paid workers in their respective disciplines in any public or private workplace in any state in Australia. The community health sector risks having a huge drain in expertise, as these health professionals can get better pay in hospitals or private practice.

Q. **Will the Liberal Party commit to ensuring that there is sufficient funding so that community health physiotherapists have wage parity and career pathway opportunities in line with physiotherapists in the Victorian public health system and /or their colleagues – such as dieticians?**

**Health Service Planning**

**Stroke Rehabilitation**
National Stroke Foundation (NSF) guidelines recommend that all patients, including those with severe stroke who are not receiving palliative care, should be assessed by a specialist rehabilitation team regarding their suitability for ongoing rehabilitation.

The NSF audit reveals that this does not happen as there is an insufficient supply of suitable rehab services (inpatient, ambulatory or home-based) so inpatient acute stroke teams pre-select patients they refer for rehabilitation assessment. This results in significant hidden demand for rehabilitation services.

Q. **Will the Liberal Party commit to providing increase rehabilitation services to allow stroke survivors to access appropriate rehabilitation?**

**Children with Mild to Moderate Disabilities**
The National Disability Insurance Scheme (NDIS) is being introduced in age-related stages.

*From 1 April 2014, the age limit in Victoria will be extended to 0-5 (up to age 6), and from 1 July 2014, children in Victoria up to 14 years of age will be covered. Roll out of the full scheme nationally is expected to commence progressively from July 2016.*

Q. **Will the Liberal Government commit to ensuring, throughout the roll-out period and transition to NDIS, children with disabilities will continue to be able to access the government subsidised services they require until such time as they are registered with the NDIS?**

**Victorian WorkCover Authority (VWA) and Transport Accident Commission (TAC)**
The APA has worked with VWA and TAC to develop a new model of physiotherapy care for compensable patients in Victoria. It focuses on early intervention, improved support and training for physiotherapists, increased remuneration and the development of quality improvement framework (QIF).

The model was launched in September 2014 and further development is required around the QIF and postoperative/complex case treatment. The model is expected to result in increased access to appropriate evidenced based care for patients of VWA and TAC.

Q. **Will the Liberal Party commit to support the further development of the Early Intervention Physiotherapy Framework (EIPF), a new model for managing the treatment and services for injured workers and TAC clients?**