

## Physiotherapy assistants: the new wave of health workers

With the rapid population ageing in Australia and its consequent need for health services, there is a widening gap between the availability of physiotherapists and the demand for their services. Although this gap is evident across Australia, rural and regional communities have greater difficulty in accessing physiotherapy services. In 2004, the APA began working with the Community Services and Health Industry Skills Council (CS&HISC) to develop competencies for a Certificate IV in Allied Health Assistance (Physiotherapy) so that a uniform standard of education for assistants could be developed across the nation. In 2007, following wide consultation with the profession, the APA voted to create a membership category for physiotherapy assistants, hoping that this membership category would also promote the development of a sustainable physiotherapy assistant workforce. In late 2009, the APA along with Esset Australia – a registered training organization – made an application via CS&HISC to the Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations (DEEWR) for funded training places for existing workers in the federal government's Enterprise Based Productivity Places Program (EBPPP). Some 50 places were obtained for physiotherapy assistant training. This paper will explore the allocation of training places, the teaching materials and resources required, the results of the competency based assessment of students and the development of new career pathways in physiotherapy and allied health assistants.