



Australian Music Therapy Association submission to Department of Health and Aged Care

Draft Aged Care Rules - Release 4a

Music therapy makes a significant difference in the lives of older people by maintaining and improving health and functioning, wellbeing and quality of life. Music therapy can promote older people's independence and ability to live at home and provide vital support for carers and residential care staff.

Many people accessing aged care support or living in residential aged care do not have access to allied health. Residents of aged care facilities are now receiving half of the eight minutes the Royal Commission found to be grossly insufficient.^A This represents a missed opportunity to maintain and improve older people's function, health and independence and reduce adverse events and serious incidents in aged care.

The Royal Commission into Aged Care Quality and Safety Final Report (Recommendation 38) listed music therapy as a core service for residential aged care, together with mental health practitioners, physiotherapists and pharmacists. Music therapy delivers significant value to senior Australians.

Music therapy delivers outcomes to older people, their carers and families

Music therapy improves:	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• cognitive skills, including orientation, attention and memory• verbal communication with others• outcomes for people with neurodegenerative diseases such as stroke, Huntington's and Parkinson's disease• interactions with family and carers• quality of life for people in palliative care• engagement in daily activities such as showering and mealtimes.
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Music therapy reduces:	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• levels or symptoms of depression and anxiety• general agitation and wandering• verbally aggressive and non-aggressive behaviour• physically aggressive and non-aggressive behaviour• restraint use in residential aged care.
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Music therapy is a necessary inclusion in aged care as an evidence-based allied health profession available through existing community-based funding streams, including the Commonwealth Home Support Program and Home Care Packages. Music therapy is included on the service list for the Support at Home program.

Access to music therapy should not be impacted by an older person's place of residence; older people who need to transition to residential aged care from the community should not be disadvantaged by reducing their

^A Department of Health and Aged Care, Quarterly Financial Snapshot – Aged Care Sector. Quarter 1 2024-25, July to September 2024 p19.

access to appropriate allied health therapies in residential care. The positive outcomes of music therapy for older people and the aged care sector warrant their inclusion in both community-based and residential aged care.

About Release 4a

AMTA notes the inclusion of allied health clinical indicators within section 166-175. We also note the indicators for restrictive practices, activities of daily living, and quality of life, which may also reflect the value of impact of allied health in aged care. We raise again the impact of music therapy in reducing biological and psychological symptoms of dementia, and the opportunity to reduce restraint and restrictive practices through an engaging therapy that also improves quality of life and the experience of older people in aged care.

Given that quality indicators often shape local practices and serve as a tool for quality improvement, AMTA is disappointed not to see music therapy listed explicitly within the sub-categories of allied health clinical professionals in Section 166-175(c). We advocate for inclusion in this listing, to reflect Recommendation 38 of the Royal Commission into Aged Care Quality and Safety Final Report, and to reinforce the value, and awareness of music therapy in residential care.

Further discussion

AMTA welcomes the opportunity to provide further information.

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