



# Community health and wellness services for ageing at home

## Southern Cross Care's centres making a difference

**In her speech at the national conference of the Aged & Community Care Providers Association, Minister for Aged Care, Anika Wells, stated that population numbers in all age groups are increasing, with most hoping to age at home.**

To make this a reality, community health and wellness services need to expand, to be able to provide quality services to all, in order to keep up the health and fitness levels required for independent living.

The purpose of community health for older adults is to provide services that allow people to live in their homes longer, supported by allied health services, such as physiotherapy, exercise physiology, occupational therapy, dietetics, podiatry and social work, among others.

Community health services aim to reach and support the individuals with the greatest risk of poor health outcomes and the greatest economic and social need.

The Australian Government has created many financial packages to support ageing at home, including the provision of allied health within the Commonwealth

Home Support service list or paid for by the home care package.

The purpose of these services is to provide evidence-based, person-centred, best-practice care, delivered with a case-to-case model that guides individual clients towards the best health pathways.

A great example of a positive health modifying program is Southern Cross Care (SA, NT & VIC) Inc. (SCC) community-facing, health and wellness services that provide prevention, reablement and restorative care for older Australians.

SCC Health & Wellness incorporates evidence-based and best-practice approaches into a service model that has significant benefits for its clients and their caregivers.

Across SA and NT, SCC has six Health & Wellness Centres that offer both on- and off-site services, five Respite Cottages, a social engagement program 'Out and About', a Telehealth program for South Australia, as well as a growing Community Transition Care Program and a wait-listed Short-Term Restorative Care program.

Programs and services offer a wide front door for entry or referral, including self-referral, My Aged Care or through

the individual's GP, and support multiple funding streams to minimise the out-of-pocket cost to the client.

No matter how clients are referred or through which funding stream, SCC uses comprehensive assessment and multidisciplinary case conferencing to guide allied health engagement, and takes a client-centred approach to service prescription.

While SCC Health & Wellness boast nine different allied health disciplines on their staff, a primary focus is to engage people into exercise pathways. Out of a total of more than 1,250 one-to-one allied health services per month, just under 40 per cent of these are through exercise physiology.

Across South Australia and the Northern Territory, the service has been well received in the community with over 3,000 clients at an average age 79.6 years, over 4,500 individual group exercise presentations per month and 6,000 respite hours delivered.

Dr Tim Henwood, SCC's Group Manager Research and Development, presented data from their extremely successful Short Term Restorative Care (STRC) program at the Victorian HealthCare Week in October.



Dr Tim Henwood says allied health programs are proven to support health and wellbeing in older Australians.

Their model is clinician-led, and focused on restoration through an intensive delivery of allied health and therapy.

Across the program, clients receive an average of five services per week, which during the second half of the program are predominantly progressive strength, conditioning and balance exercise.

Sessions have a strong focus on health literacy, chronic disease management, discharge planning, falls prevention and functional independence.

Program evaluation of 157 participants (average age 80.2 years) between admission and discharge showed a 45 per cent improvement in function (measured by the Short Physical Performance Battery) accompanied by reduced depression, anxiety and frailty prevalence.

Dr Henwood is a strong advocate for active healthy ageing in the community and says “exercise is the only answer to prolonging independence”. There is an abundance of research evidence to support this statement.

“For ongoing health and wellbeing among community-dwelling older Australians, we need an equation of improved health literacy for clients, their family and caregivers; person-centred, individualised allied health; financial support for clients to initially engage; as well a range of activities to support adherence,” he says.

“Health and wellness services that include allied health and exercise therapy offer a proven countermeasure to health issues often seen in home care clients, including frailty and loneliness.

“A multidisciplinary care plan offers prescribed and meaningful physical, social and mental health engagement.

“Multidisciplinary allied health teams’ expertise must be part of all care planning if aged care providers truly want to prevent the health decline, or reable clients towards independence.”

Dr Henwood encourages community care and home care providers to familiarise themselves with the existing funding pathways for allied health,

which can provide significant health improvement independent of age, disease or disability, as verified by their STRC program evidence.

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