



**ESSA:**  
EXERCISE & SPORTS SCIENCE AUSTRALIA

**2024**

**Northern Territory  
Election Priorities**



# Exercise for good health and a strong economy

The Northern Territory is a unique, beautiful region with an equally diverse community. Ensuring the health and sustainability of its land and people is a challenge and providing quality health care will always be a priority of government.

To help address the barriers to health services, Exercise & Sports Science Australia (ESSA) is determined to work closely with all political parties in the Northern Territory (NT) to deliver affordable, accessible and quality health care <sup>[1]</sup>.

Compounding the issues of accessibility is the prevalence of chronic conditions, which impacts three quarters of Territorians <sup>[2]</sup>. Physical inactivity is also a widespread concern, as only a quarter of the population is meeting physical activity guidelines <sup>[2]</sup>.

Physical inactivity is a major risk factor for poor health and premature death. It can cause several long-term health conditions, such as cardiovascular disease, diabetes and osteoporosis. Conversely, regular exercise improves mental and physical health, and reduces the risk of obesity, high blood pressure and high cholesterol.

ESSA believes the incoming NT Government can prioritise the health and wellbeing of Territorians by embedding physical activity interventions in primary health care.

**ESSA calls for the appointment of 1 x FTE Accredited Exercise Physiologist (AEP) in every public hospital in the Northern Territory.**

AEPs are university-trained allied health professionals that prescribe evidence-based exercise programs to prevent, treat and manage physical and mental health conditions. Their services are accessible through Medicare, National Disability Insurance Scheme (NDIS), Department of Veterans' Affairs (DVA), workers compensation schemes and private health insurers.

We urge all political parties to commit to reducing health inequalities and protecting the long-term physical and mental health of Territorians by way of our recommendation.

This ask has been drawn from member feedback, community engagement and research. Our work with members is ongoing as we campaign for meaningful change.

## Who we are



Exercise & Sports Science Australia (ESSA) is the nation's leading voice on exercise and sports science. We govern and represent degree-qualified professionals who support Australians to reach their health and performance goals.

ESSA sets the professional standard for over 9,800 accredited exercise physiologists, exercise scientists, sports scientists and high performance managers. We support them with lifelong education, evidence-based tools, and a strong community of peers.

By upholding rigorous standards and a robust disciplinary process, we safeguard the integrity of the profession.

We actively engage with governments and policy makers to advocate for the vital role of proven exercise methodologies in health and sports performance.

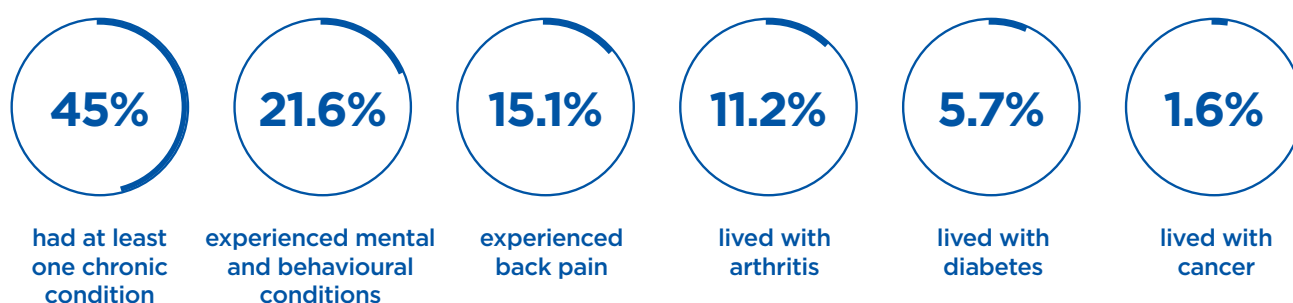
Together, we strive towards a future where exercise and sports science are universally recognised as essential for a healthier Australia.

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## Appoint 1 x FTE Accredited Exercise Physiologist in every public hospital in the Northern Territory.

According to the Australian Bureau of Statistics 2022 state and territory data <sup>[2]</sup>, of the 250,000 residents in the Northern Territory:



The pressure on the health system is exacerbating the impact of chronic disease among the population. A lack of specialists that can treat chronic disease is also hindering communities from modifying risk factors and receiving effective care.

AEPs are a skilled and values-based allied health workforce that is readily available but is yet to be utilised in the Territory. As a leading risk factor for several diseases, physical inactivity is most effectively addressed by accredited exercise clinicians.

For this to change, clinical physical activity interventions must be accessible. This can be achieved by embedding multidisciplinary teams of allied health professionals, including an Accredited Exercise Physiologist whose role is prescribing physical activity, into primary health care.

Multidisciplinary care has many benefits. The approach supports high levels of self-efficacy and self-management among patients, higher levels of adherence to treatment plans and improved health outcomes <sup>[3]</sup>. It is also cost-effective and has better utilisation of resources <sup>[3]</sup>.

The expertise of AEPs within these teams is the delivery of individualised exercise and behaviour change programs. Their interventions prevent and manage disease or injury to restore function, health and wellbeing <sup>[3]</sup>. They also address the barriers to maintaining regular exercise, such as psychosocial factors, family or job responsibilities, injury or mobility limitations and other deterrents <sup>[3]</sup>.

Unfortunately, physical activity provided in standard care is often the least comprehensive component of care. AEPs are the only clinician dedicated to the provision of the National Physical Activity Guidelines, which need comprehensive and tailored recommendations for individual adoption.

### Clinical exercise interventions reduce the burden of disease

Mental health, cancer and diabetes are a few examples of chronic conditions that are effectively treated with clinical exercise prescription.

Exercise is an effective treatment for mental health conditions, <sup>[4]</sup> particularly for those living in rural and remote communities <sup>[5]</sup>. The success of physical activity interventions in the treatment of mental health within rural communities is evident through the delivery of the Healthy Eating Activity and Lifestyle (HEAL) scheme. Participants reported lower levels of psychological distress, improvements in physical fitness parameters, and have maintained behaviour change as measured by a post-program follow-up <sup>[6]</sup>.



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The adoption of exercise in oncology is proven to counteract many adverse physical and psychological effects of cancer and its treatment while delivering associated cost savings. Up to \$22,000 in reduced health care costs per patient can be unlocked<sup>[7]</sup>, as well as lower hospitalisation rates, improved longevity and quality of life<sup>[8]</sup>. This evidence is recognised by the Clinical Oncology Society of Australia, which calls for exercise to be embedded as part of standard cancer care practice<sup>[9]</sup>.

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people experience diabetes four times the rate of non-Indigenous Australians<sup>[10]</sup>. The Too Deadly for Diabetes program led exercise interventions for Indigenous people and reported its participants saw dramatic improvements in the management of their condition, plus improved stamina and quality of life<sup>[11]</sup>. Exercise prescribed under expert guidance is a crucial lifestyle therapy for preventing and managing diabetes<sup>[12,13]</sup> and should be part of every patient's management plan<sup>[14]</sup>.

AEPs currently work across the country in various settings, yet ESSA members in the NT report that as of July 2024 only one is employed in the region's public health system. To achieve the goals of the NT Health Strategic Plan 2023-2028 and the Mental Health and Suicide Prevention Agreement, accredited exercise professionals should be embedded in all public hospitals in the NT.

### ESSA'S CALL TO ACTION

The 2024 NT Election is an unmissable opportunity to transform health care prevention and management, leading to better health outcomes for all Territorians.

ESSA calls on all NT political parties to:

- › Recruit 1 x FTE Accredited Exercise Physiologist to each of the Territory's six public hospitals.
- › Embed multidisciplinary teams in primary health care to deliver lifestyle interventions and minimise disease risk factors.

ESSA looks forward to meeting with all candidates of the 2024 NT election to discuss this recommendation and achieve systemic change in healthcare and ultimately improve the quality of life of all NT residents.

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