

The role of osteopathy in residential aged care for older Australians

The aim of this position statement is to ensure that older Australians living in residential care have access to osteopaths for the improvement of the quality of care provided to the ageing population.

The role of osteopaths in residential aged care

Osteopaths are integral to the multidisciplinary allied health team and play a pivotal role in preventative care for older Australians. Osteopaths are trained in a range of manual therapy, exercise prescription and other evidence-based techniques that can assist older Australians to manage various conditions associated with ageing.

Osteopaths provide care to older Australians for musculoskeletal conditions, falls prevention, rehabilitation for falls and other conditions, general mobility and to help older Australians stay in the community for longer:

- Fall prevention - reviewing residents post fall to assess injuries and concerns and adjust plans (e.g. gait, stability, postural, functional capacity and other activity-based assessments).
- Comprehensive musculoskeletal and health care assessments incorporating biopsychical focus (e.g. assessing client needs against physiological capabilities and injuries).
- Developing therapy plans and providing interventions to meet needs, goals and preferences of residents, to support their wellness and quality of life (e.g. exercise-based therapies).

What is Osteopathy Australia advocating for?

Osteopathy Australia is advocating for:

1. Access to the right skill and mix of workforce by leveraging existing sector reforms.
2. The provision of clear and accurate communication to the sector about key changes to avoid breaches under the new legislation.
3. Mirroring or aligning multiple regulations across the care sectors to avoid duplication, cost or administrative/regulatory burdens.
4. Any additional regulation must be affordable and geared towards improving quality and safety.
5. Ahpra registration and the quality, safety mechanisms and complaint investigations it provides should be recognised to avoid duplication of checks and processes.
6. Sustainable and affordable registration, with a preference for registration to have zero cost for health professionals.

Aligning with other sectors

The Aged Care Bill 2024 omits how it will integrate with other funding schemes an older Australian

may receive. There must be more consistent communication between government services, creating a cohesive system across:

- aged care
- disability
- mental health
- community services
- primary care
- workers' compensation
- transport accident schemes.

Better streamlined care should be afforded to older Australians receiving care in an aged care setting.

The Aged Care Bill 2024 needs to consider the governing acts and legislation that may interrelate with the older person. This unified system could offer cross-sector training for care providers to enhance their understanding of various schemes and improve their ability to guide older persons through the complexities of accessing services under different programs. It would have the potential to introduce specialised navigation services that could assist older Australians in navigating the intricacies of various schemes, guiding available options, eligibility criteria, and funding tailored to a person centred approach. By adopting these measures, the Australian Government could create a more integrated, user-friendly system that addresses older Australian's diverse needs and could save and preserve rather than exhaust already burdened resources.

Osteopathy Australia is advocating for integrated government systems to enable cross-sector collaboration with existing services.

Provide access to equitable funding

Provide funding to ensure equitable access to the MBS Better Access initiative for aged care residents as one of multiple pathways to osteopathic support. All Australians, irrespective of where they reside, should have access to Medicare rebates for musculoskeletal, chronic and other conditions.

Osteopathy Australia is advocating for better access to funding for older Australians accessing osteopathic care in aged care.

What do we want to achieve?

We want clear access to osteopathy for older Australians, especially the inclusion of osteopathy under the definition of allied health. Osteopathy Australia is calling on government stakeholders to make these changes.

Why this benefits Australians

- Older Australians have better access to the care they need, when they need it.
- It gives older Australians choice and control over their care options.
- It increases the supply of osteopaths available in residential aged care, helping to reduce the impact of current workforce shortages across Australia.
- Improves access and equity for Australians to aged care services.

Policy issues and barriers

- Osteopathy is a workforce that is already working in residential care with older Australians. Without including osteopathy under the definition of allied health, it removes their ability to provide the right services to older Australians and encourages osteopaths to exit from the sector. This is a high risk to the already thin workforce.
- Older Australians may be at a greater risk of hospitalisation in residential aged care facilities without access to osteopathy.
- Inappropriate remuneration for osteopaths will result in an exit from osteopaths working in the aged care sector.

Educational Integration:

It is important that the university curriculum continues to teach osteopathy students about aged care. Aged care is a growing area and will continue to require expansion of the workforce based on the population requirements. External practical requirements should also be adhered to exhibiting the opportunities across aged care.

Review

This position statement will be reviewed as often as required to align with legislative, regulatory, policy and/or practice change. Last review: January 2026.

Need more information or help?

For further information, a suggestion or to discuss this topic, please:

- Email your enquiry to info@osteopathy.org.au
- Call Osteopathy Australia on 1800 467 836
- Access further information via www.osteopathy.org.au
- Refer to our [aged care cheat sheet](#) detailing everything you need to know right now.