

2026 Clinical Excellence Showcase

Exercise Physiologists – Innovating Acute Mental Healthcare

Matthew Wall – Senior Exercise Physiologist

Mental Health Acute Inpatient Service, West Moreton Hospital and Health Service

Introduction

The opening of Mental Health Acute Inpatient Service (MHAIS) in 2023 incorporated many innovations to improve consumer access to evidence based and person-centred therapeutic services. This included pioneering the integration of a permanent full time Exercise Physiologist (EP) within an acute inpatient mental health service (AIMHS) multi-disciplinary team, which was a first for Queensland. The aim of Exercise Physiology service was to provide individual and group-based clinical Exercise Physiology and supportive therapeutic interventions to assist in mental health recovery and manage physical health comorbidities.

Objectives

- Conduct a comprehensive 2-year evaluation of the Exercise Physiology service in MHAIS
- Provide recommendations for statewide workforce development and service large scale adaptation.

Method

- Comprehensive examination and analysis of the MHAIS Exercise Physiology referral demographics, service provision data (CIMHA), therapeutic outcomes, staff and consumer feedback collected from January 2024 to December 2025.

Results

Staffing profile:

- **1.0 HP4 FTE** for 1st 14 months
- Additional **1.0 HP3 FTE** for last 10 months -West Moreton Allied Health Mental Health New Graduate Program
- 1 x 6-week full-time clinical Exercise Physiology student placement facilitated in 2025

Referral Demographics:

- **794** referrals received.
- **52.7%** Male, **47.0%** Female, **0.3%** Other Gender
- Average age **45.1y.o** (Range: **16-93**)
- **57.2%** and **77.6%** had a physical health or/and secondary mental health or substance use disorder diagnosis
- **43%** that reported physical health condition had **>3** physical health conditions

Service Activity:

- **2544** occasions of service delivered (61.9% group-based)
- **50438** minutes of total Provision of service (POS)
- **416%** increase in exercise and physical activity POS compared to 2-years prior to EP integration
- **373%** increase in physical health assessment POS compared to 2-years prior to EP integration.

Clinical outcomes:

- Average self-reported pre and post mental wellbeing was **6.4 - 8.2**.
- 1:1 EP sessions indicated the greatest benefits (**5.9-8.9**) in the **pre and post** mental wellbeing ratings
- Nil **code blue** (medical) or **code black** (aggressive behaviour) events during EP sessions and/or gym access.

MHAIS Consumer and Staff Feedback

"[The EPs] both ignited my health journey in a time of my life that at times it was scary and dark, but attending their programs gave so much happiness and joy" - Consumer

"Asking what I want to achieve, not just being told. Also helping with creating a positive and mindful relationship with the exercise body and mind." - Consumer

"The Exercise Physiology service here in MHAIS has exceeded all expectations. The correlation between consumer satisfaction and recovery-based care is well established with a strong Exercise Physiology program in the acute setting" - Nurse Unit Manager

"Promoting good physical health and enhancing the notion of body and mind's bidirectional connection. Practical application of useful skill to improve and enhance physical and mental health" - Consultant Psychiatrist

Conclusions

1. Service activity data, clinical outcomes and consumer feedback indicates that the Exercise Physiology service was highly utilised and positively influenced the recovery journeys of consumers.
2. The Exercise Physiology service was perceived as highly valuable by MHAIS staff which exceeded their expectations.
3. EPs provide safe, effective and highly valuable therapeutic services for AIMHS consumers and should be integrated as a core service provider into existing and service planning for new AIMHSs.
4. The integration of EPs offer a unique opportunity for AIMHSs to demonstrate innovation, expand workforce capability and increase access to evidence-based service delivery.
5. The inclusion of EPs into Mental Health Allied Health New graduate programs is feasible and significantly increases workforce development pathways and increases service capacity.

