



Music Therapy & Older Adults

What is Music Therapy?

Music therapy is a professional discipline that uses music to achieve therapeutic aims. Music therapy is the use of music to address nursing home residents' social, emotional, mental, communication, and/or physical needs.

Who is a registered music therapist (RMT)?

Registered music therapists (RMTs) are skilled and qualified musicians and therapists who assess, design, implement and evaluate programs to meet the needs of individual clients.

What makes music therapy different?

Music therapy is practised by qualified health professionals, who are registered with the Australian Music Therapy Association (AMTA) upon completion of an accredited music therapy course. Drawing on their university training in areas such as psychology and physiology, RMTs assess individuals' needs, design and implement music therapy care plans to address identified needs, and regularly evaluate and document outcomes of treatment. This distinguishes them from musicians who provide entertainment to nursing homes. One does not need musical skill or background to benefit from a music therapy program, and registered music therapists are trained to support people of all levels of ability.

Music Therapy Goals

Individualised music therapy goals are determined by the RMT through initial music therapy assessment and ongoing review of the client. In aged care, common music therapy goals include:

- ♪ Reducing social withdrawal/isolation
- ♪ Reducing anxious or aggressive behaviours
- ♪ Alleviating feelings of pain, depression or boredom
- ♪ Improving self-esteem
- ♪ Facilitating self-expression
- ♪ Maintaining mental abilities
- ♪ Maintaining physical functioning

Music Therapy Techniques

Nursing home residents may be seen on an individual or group basis, depending on their needs and preferences. Within his/her music therapy treatment, a nursing home resident may participate through:

- ♪ Requesting favourite songs
- ♪ Listening to music
- ♪ Singing

- ♪ Playing instruments
- ♪ Dancing/Moving to music
- ♪ Song writing
- ♪ Performing in a choir/band
- ♪ Reminiscing/Life reviewing
- ♪ Discussing feelings with a qualified therapist

Results/Outcomes

Research has shown that music therapy is successful in maintaining or improving the wellbeing of people who have had strokes, those who have a mental illness or some form of dementia, as well as the frail elderly. Documented outcomes include:

- ♪ Increased participation, social interaction or alert responses
- ♪ Reduction in agitated behaviours
- ♪ Reduction in depressive symptoms
- ♪ Improved speech content and fluency
- ♪ Improved self-image



Music Therapy Program Funding:

Nursing homes currently receive federal government funding for music therapy under question 20 in the Resident Classification Scale. As funding levels are determined based on the frequency of music therapy treatment, the greater the number of hours a registered music therapist is employed, the greater the benefits to a nursing home in terms of funding.

Some aged care organisations (e.g. Anglican Care of the Aged, Blue Care) have employed Registered Music Therapists on staff, at pay rates similar to other allied health professionals (i.e. physiotherapists, occupational therapists and speech pathologists). Other aged care facilities have contracted RMTs as visiting service providers and negotiated rates of pay with the particular visiting therapist. Potential employers should be aware that RMTs working on a contract basis require adequate pay to cover equipment, insurances (e.g. professional indemnity, public liability, income protection, instrument protection), superannuation, taxation and sick/holiday pay. Contracting therapists usually charge a smaller hourly rate with increasing number of service hours per week.

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Further reading

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