Background

- Physiotherapy assistants have had a long history of working in the public sector and large private practices, particularly in rehab and aged care areas.

- More recently there has been growth in acute care settings.

- Wide range of educational backgrounds including:
  - On the job training
  - Certificate III & IV (Allied Health Assistance)
  - Enrolled nurse
  - Degree in Human Movement/Exercise Science

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Workforce Issues

- Recognition that there could be far greater numbers of assistants in the profession, particularly if a suitable Certificate IV qualification could be developed.

- Driven by:
  - Shortage of Physiotherapists, despite number of programs having grown from 9 to 20+ in last 10 years
  - Advanced practice opportunities increasing plus possibility of new roles in the future.
  - Growth in the older population, increasing the amount of work amenable increasing the involvement of assistants

- Similar developments overseas, particularly in the UK, have benefitted both physiotherapists and assistants.
Collaboration with the CSHISC

- In 2004 the APA commenced working with CSHISC to develop the competencies for Certificate IV in Allied Health Assistance (Physiotherapy)

- Completed in 2007
How were the competencies developed?

- Reference to existing policy on physiotherapy assistants
- Examining aide courses run by APA
- Reviewing the training framework and existing qualifications and competencies
- Discussions with Board members and staff
- Widespread consultation with the profession across all sectors
Physiotherapy Stream

- The mandatory elective skill set in *Physiotherapy* requires all 3 electives from the *Physiotherapy* group

  HLTAH401A Deliver and monitor a client-specific exercise program

  HLTAH402A Assist with physiotherapy treatments and interventions

  HLTAH403A Deliver and monitor exercise program for mobility
Courses Available

- Initially only generic allied health assistance streams offered
- Number of courses with physiotherapy stream now growing
- Essential if physiotherapists are to have the confidence to delegate more roles to assistants and if assistants are to have job satisfaction
APA Initiatives

- Development of membership category
- Supervision framework
- Promotion of physiotherapy membership of concept
APA Membership

- APA Board initiated concept in 2006 and commenced consultation with the membership

- Benefits:
  - Opportunity to develop policy and educational programs for assistants
  - Opportunity to develop a collaborative framework for standards of practice and supervision between physiotherapists and assistants
  - Opportunity for physiotherapists to develop a closer interaction with assistants through membership and governance framework

- UK and US associations both have an assistant membership category

- Constitutional changes approved at the 2007 Annual General Meeting,

- Membership for Physiotherapy Assistants commenced in 2008
Membership Eligibility

- The APA determines a person to be eligible for APA membership under the assistant category if they have completed a **Certificate IV Allied Health or equivalent**.

- However, until more Certificate IV qualifications are being offered and completed, for current membership purposes, one or more of the following apply:
  - A minimum Certificate III Allied Health, and working as a PTA,
  - An international Physiotherapy graduate not eligible for Australian registration working as a PTA,
  - Have worked as a PTA for 5 years as vouched for by an APA member employer
Membership Benefits – Physiotherapy Assistants

• Access to a large range of APA member services including money-saving commercial benefits and discounts.

• Networking opportunities to receive information about, and contribute, to issues specific to assistants.

• Monthly inmotion magazine & access to Physiotherapy Journal to keep informed about what is happening in the profession.

• Demonstration of professionalism and commitment to contributing to health care, both to colleagues and to the people being cared for.

• Helping advance the careers of those who work in the physiotherapy and physiotherapy assistant arena by adding a voice to the APA advocacy agenda.
Current Situation

- 42 assistant members in 2010, 17 in Victoria
- Once 50 member threshold is reached, assistants will become eligible for a representative at the National Advisory Council
- Assistant specific professional development is planned locally at a branch level
Conclusion

An important move for the APA and for the health workforce which coordinates all aspects of the physiotherapy workforce under one professional association

Thank you