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Media Release

New data shows positive impact of exercise on cancer survivors' returning to work ***Patients' physical fatigue levels improved by 36 percent after starting regular exercise routine***

Melbourne, 10 May 2022 – Leading life, health and wellbeing insurer AIA Australia has released new data highlighting the important role that exercise physiology plays in optimising the physical and mental wellbeing of cancer patients.

Cancer is one of the major causes of illness and death in Australia, with over 150,000 people diagnosed in 2021 alone¹. According to AIA Australia, cancer is one of the top three conditions claimed by its life insurance income protection customers, however concerningly, despite increasing rates of survivorship, 40 percent of those of working age never return to work².

In 2021, AIA Australia and EXPHYS, an exercise physiology specialist, ran a joint study with 45 cancer patients aged between 26 and 63 years, all claiming AIA life insurance income protection. With 60 percent of cancer patients in Australia not meeting the recommended exercise guidelines, the study aimed to understand the impact of physical activity on cancer patients' health and mental wellbeing. Over an average of a 19-week period, study participants were offered a program which comprised an average of seven hours of supervised exercise physiology

Key findings from the study included:

- Patients' working hours increased from 5 hours to 18 hours per week after four months of following the exercise program, and further increased to 23 hours per week after 10 months.
- Physical fatigue levels improved by 36 per cent
- Mental health improved with feelings of depression down by 41 per cent, anxiety down by 43 per cent and stress down by 39 per cent
- Depression, anxiety and stress all reduced from mild or moderate severity to normal clinical levels

In addition, prior to the program commencing, participants' physical activity scores were less than half the recommended levels. After completing the program, these scores increased by 184%, meaning that the physical activity levels of the cancer survivors exceeded those of non-cancer sufferers.

The exercise regimes in the program, specially developed by EXPHYS, were tailored to each individual and delivered either in person or via telehealth. They typically included a mix of cardiovascular, resistance and flexibility training. When appropriate, functional exercise was tailored towards daily activities and work. The research findings have highlighted that exercise physiology, delivered in person or via telehealth, increases habitual activity levels and improves the chances of a successful return to work as well as fatigue and mental health levels.

Some of the common complications associated with cancer treatment that prevent patients from returning to work are fatigue, anxiety, depression, 'chemo fog', and a fear of recurrence. Exercise is an evidence-based solution to overcoming the barriers that prevent a cancer survivor from thriving after treatment and as such, the Clinical Oncology Society of Australia recommends³ that all people diagnosed with cancer incorporate exercise into their treatment routines. This study provides further evidence that with the right support, patients can not only survive their diagnosis, but thrive after recovery.

Return to work is not yet recognised as a key health outcome; yet it is vital if cancer survivors are to live a full and meaningful life post-recovery. AIA recognises that there is a critical need to provide early intervention and support to help these Australians successfully transition to life after cancer.

¹ <https://www.aihw.gov.au/reports/cancer/cancer-in-australia-2021/summary>

² <https://insightplus.mja.com.au/2019/6/return-to-work-after-cancer-a-key-health-outcome/>

³ <https://www.cosa.org.au/media/332488/cosa-position-statement-v4-web-final.pdf>

AIA Australia CEO and Managing Director Damien Mu said, “To address the major barriers to cancer recovery, we need to recognise that people living with cancer often require additional support that the current system doesn’t generally provide. AIA is able to bridge this gap by giving customers access to oncology-specific exercise programs.

“We’re pleased that this research highlights the important role that exercise plays in cancer recovery. We hope it encourages further discussion and leads to significant improvements in the quality of life for cancer survivors.”

EXPHYS Managing Director, Chris Sinclair, said, “With the health challenges and time commitment of cancer treatment, it’s crucial to provide flexible health services that accommodate the needs of each cancer patient. This includes service location, delivery method, and independent exercise support structures.

Our cancer patients were seen at their choice of home, outdoors, hospital, or gymnasium, through mobile in-person or telehealth. We also integrated family, friends, and other community services. This program shows that clinical best-practice exercise oncology guidelines, coupled with accommodating patient preferences, achieves life-changing results for people living with cancer.

This data convincingly builds on the exercise oncology research predominately conducted in university facility settings, by providing ‘real world’ evidence.”

-ENDS-

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About AIA Australia

AIA Australia is a leading life insurance specialist with 50 years’ experience and a commitment to help Australians live healthier, longer, better lives. In 2014 the company launched AIA Vitality, a world leading, science-based health and wellbeing program, to the Australian market. In July 2017, AIA and its partners launched AIA’s health insurance business, now known as AIA Health Insurance.

In 2021, CommInsure Life was integrated into AIA Australia. The lives of more than 3.8 million Australians are protected and enhanced through AIA Australia’s unique value proposition of life, health and wellbeing. Our vision is to embrace shared value in championing Australia and New Zealand to be the healthiest and best protected nations in the world.

AIA Australia has been recognised with multiple awards, including the Women in Finance Employer of the Year Award (2018, 2019), Super Review’s Best Insurer of the Year (2018, 2019), FSC Life Insurance Industry Awards Innovation in Group Life Insurance (2021), Shared Value Awards Corporate Organisation Leading Through Shared Value (2019), Shared Value Awards Organisation of the Year (2020) and Shared Value Project of the Year (2021).

Further information at www.aia.com.au.

About EXPHYS

EXPHYS is a leading provider of exercise physiology and health programs that restore client health for life and work. The organisation holds expertise in exercise oncology, pain and fatigue science, and mental health. EXPHYS' team of professionals are Exercise Physiologists, accredited with Exercise and Sports Science Australia (ESSA) and Sport and Exercise Science New Zealand (SESNZ). They have expert knowledge in occupational and rehabilitation health.

Covering Australia and New Zealand wide, EXPHYS' services are provided through mobile in-person and telehealth technology.

Serving the Life Insurance, Workers Compensation, and Motor Accident industries since 2008, EXPHYS partners with some of Australia and New Zealand's largest insurers and employers to deliver innovative and award-winning health programs.

Further information at <https://exphys.com.au/>

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