

Yoga for Pain *Down South*

Yoga for Pain *Down South* is an 18-month pilot of an innovative model for chronic pain management. Yoga for Pain Care Australia, in partnership with GP down south, trained and engaged non-traditional providers to offer chronic pain support and prevention in regional communities. To assist with increasing demands on Australia's health and social care systems, our stretch target was to achieve new services that continue without funding.

Informed by global pain research, local knowledge and health promotion principles, the first phase of *Yoga for Pain Down South* began in February 2018 and was funded through WA Primary Health Alliance, participant fees, and in-kind support from the two organisations. This report is a summary of results of this first phase, and subsequent one-year Phase 2.

Project Partners

About Yoga for Pain Care Australia

Yoga for Pain Care Australia has been training health professionals, yoga teachers and mental health workers as Yoga for Pain Practitioners since 2015. Our mission is to address the gap in post-tertiary support, so people with persistent pain have somewhere to go to maintain self-management - and get their life back.

About GP Down South

GP Down South is a not-for-profit community organisation providing health and wellbeing services in the Peel and South West regions of WA. This includes Nidjalla Waangan Mia Aboriginal Health and Wellbeing Centre, Peel Youth Medical Service, Chronic Disease Management and Mental Health Services.

Why we wanted to improve options for people in chronic disease hot spots

More people experience chronic pain in regional Australia than our cities, increasing the prevalence of unemployment, social isolation and mental illness - and their flow-on economic costs.

Chronic pain costs Australia \$34b each year and affects 1 in 5 people, including children. In what can be a vicious cycle, pain can lead to depression, suicide ideation and social isolation - which are also its risk factors. In particular, those living in chronic disease hot spots (high health needs, low services) have experienced years, or even decades, of poor health.

While pain education has increased for health professionals, specialist services are almost non-existent outside major cities. Even those who do access good medical care can "fall through the net". Tele-health trials by major hospitals increasingly provide patients with knowledge, but don't offer the ongoing support needed for patients to practice pain management skills on their own.

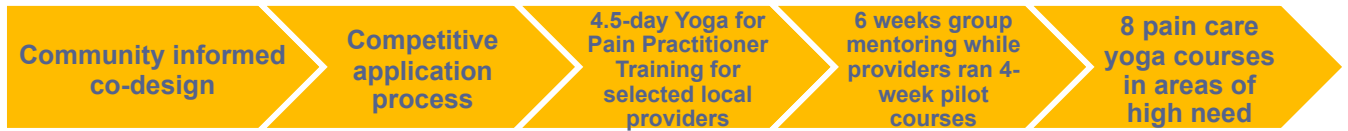
We applied a systems design approach for long term impact

Working closely with GP down south, Yoga for Pain Care Australia analysed the region's health, social and economic situation. We used this information to create a tailored training program for local healthcare professionals and yoga teachers. Research informed such things as delivered content, price we would charge providers for training, and participants fees for subsequent Yoga for Pain programs. Because we wanted the initiative to be self-sustaining, subsidised places in Yoga for Pain programs were

offered to those meeting certain health and economic conditions. Our informing question was: **What sort of commitment is required, and feasible, so participants attend often enough to receive benefit?**

Phase 1 Activities: February to June 2018

The first phase of Yoga for Pain Down South comprised five key stages - or, in the language of social impact, five key “activities”:



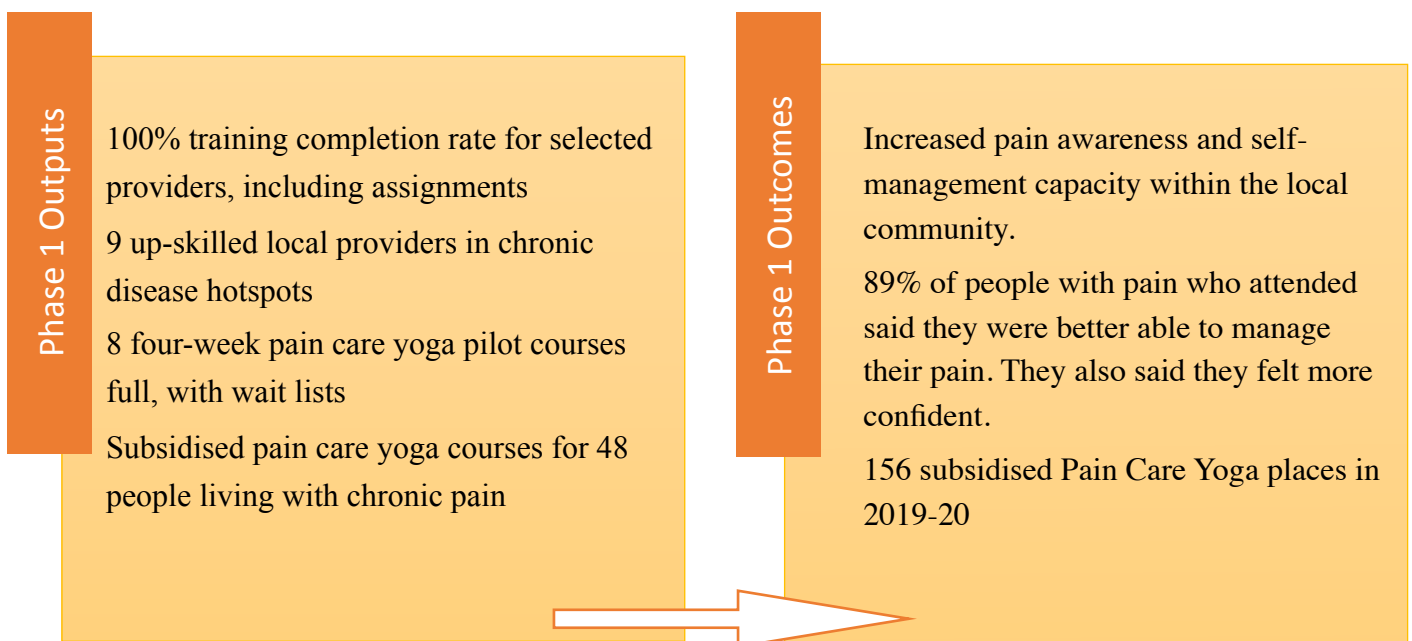
To reduce barriers to participation, the program was supported by resources such as:

- 1) The Yoga for Pain Practitioner **Register** so health professionals and individuals could locate providers
- 2) Yoga for Pain **Referral Guidelines**
- 3) **Research summaries**

Phase 1 Results

Over 40 providers applied for places in the development program, which were offered on partial scholarship. Selection was based on demonstrated interest in chronic pain care, experience making a difference in community, and diversity of perspective to contribute to group learning. The cohort included yoga teachers, physiotherapists, one occupational therapist and an emergency nurse.

After a 4.5-day group training, each provider ran a four-week pain care yoga pilot course, supported through mentoring. These courses were full, with wait lists. *Yoga for Pain Down South* attracted media attention, including a video by ABC South West with over 10,000 views.



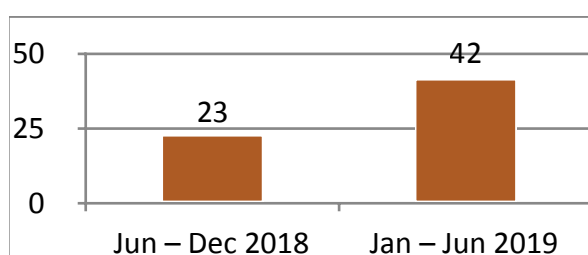
Phase 2 Activities: July 2018 - June 2019

Trained providers who successfully passed Phase 1 requirements joined the **national community of Yoga for Pain Practitioners**. They delivered pain care yoga for private and referred clients in their regional town, engaged with the community, and collected data on their work.

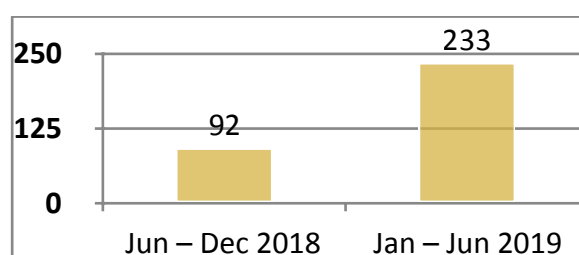
Phase 2 Results

a. Referrals to Yoga for Pain increased by 83% over the 12-month trial period

Increase in referrals show health professional support for these transitional community services. The 153% increase in occasions of service demonstrate successful conversion of referrals into pain patients taking up Yoga for Pain services. Contributing factors include Yoga for Pain Practitioners engaging with GP practices, and participating in joint education sessions to health professionals and community with the Pain Revolution Local Pain Educator.



**New referrals to Yoga for Pain
(services increased by 83%)**



**Occasions of services
(increased by 153%)**

b. High engagement compared to other services

Anecdotally, attendance at Yoga for Pain services is higher than equivalent pain and mental health programs. Participant feedback comprised three key themes: appreciation for the care of the provider, exploratory nature of new awarenesses, and understanding the importance of regular practice.

“I recognise some of the triggers and stop and think first.”

“I am noticing continuous improvement. “

“If I had the class again I think it would help my health more and become more of a habit at home.”

c. New services in new locations, areas of health and varied price points

WAPHA funding that subsidised places for people with pain on low incomes ended after 12 months, but Practitioners continue to offer services at a range of price points and locations. For example, one Margaret River Practitioner offers half price classes to make regular attendance possible for people with pain, effectively subsidising places with those who can pay full price for regular services. Practitioners have also created new services in Busselton and a mindful movement program for mental health.

What's next?

Yoga for Pain Care Australia is investigating partnerships to replicate the initiative across regional Australia. We are also exploring feasibility of a similarly-researched program to meet the needs of under-served groups, such as people with mental health challenges, and children with persistent pain. Applications for independent training in 2020 open early January.

More information

For briefings of the full project report please contact Rachael West rachael@yogaforpaincare.com.