

Health Coaching - What do GP's need to know about hiring a Health and Wellness Coach?

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Research shows that given the global challenges we face in primary care of chronic disease management; Health & Wellness Coaches are ideally placed to become part of the solution in a collaborative patient-centred model delivering behaviour change programs.¹. What is so special about a Health Coaching Relationship? **Health & wellness coaching is both a science and an art form. Successful patient health outcomes rely on health& wellness coaching being more than a series of lockstep scripted processes.** Fundamentally, Health Coaching encompasses **the application of the theories and science** of positive psychology, behaviour change and appreciative inquiry, all the tenets of nutrition and lifestyle medicine with **the dynamic art** of relationships, teamwork and community.

Health & wellness coaching in Australia and New Zealand, at the moment, is broadly unregulated by government or industry. But that is changing. Internationally and within Australia & New Zealand an industry-driven initiative is ensuring that standards that support credibility, efficacy and sustainability of Health & Wellness Coaching as a profession are emerging.

National Board for Health & Wellness Coach Certification

A robust, science-based Board Certification process for H&W Coaches exists in the USA and is accepted internationally.

The recent launch of an industry association Health Coaches Australia & New Zealand (HCANZA) is leading the way in establishing relevant standards within our geographic region. While there is no Board Certification process, as yet agreed to by all relevant stakeholders, the US National Board Certification standard supported by the USA Medical Examiners Board and the American Medical Association, is highly relevant and has become the reference standard used by HCANZA.

5 tips for Doctors hiring a Health & Wellness Coach

1. **Qualifications and Skill Set:** There are two broad types of Health & Wellness qualifications supported by NB HWC. Those with full coaching qualification and additional functional/integrative medicine training, or, those with the full coaching qualifications and baseline nutrition and lifestyle medicine training
2. **Program advantage:** Have a clear view of what benefits and programs a Health Coach can bring to your practice and patients. If you have a program of Shared Medical appointments – Health Coaches are a logical next step. Patients who are co-morbid also benefit from the complexity unravelling that health coaches can deliver. Where your patients have long term weight management goals, HC is also an advantage for delivering sustainable behaviour change.
3. **Prior experience:** Consider how much health-related background experience suits your needs. For example, are you looking for a Health Coach that is also a nurse or may have spent time in private practice? What type of delivery method suits your patients – zoom? telephone? in clinic?
4. **Billing model:** Health Coaching is privately funded but very affordable at \$40 - \$55 per 30 minutes. One of the advantages of a HC is that they can work remotely and flexibly keeping overheads low.
5. **Values:** Working as part of a team is fundamental to the success of any Health and Wellness Coaching Program and patient outcomes. Ensure the HC values are a good fit for your team.

In a recent interview with an IM GP, operating from regional NSW who contracts with a Health Coach based in Albany W.A. said "Honestly, I couldn't have imagined what a huge difference this (H&WC) has made for me, my patients and their success.

¹ Michelle Beidelschies, PhD; Marilyn Alejandro-Rodriguez et al; Association of the Functional Medicine Model of Care With Patient Reported Health-Related Quality-of-Life Outcomes. JAMA Network Open 2019;2(10):e194017.doi:10.1001/jamanetworkopen.2019.14017

It was the same when GPs were first introducing exercise physiologists. The benefits are enormous for our patients and that has a huge impact on our Practice”

Drs. agree on Clinical Perspective working with Health Coaches²

Improved Clinical Outcomes, adherence to treatment plans, and patient empowerment

100% - Empowering the patient and improvement in self- management

84.6% - Dr could delegate specific task to HC that increased patient uptake of programs

84.6 % - HC helped bridge any communication gaps

69.2% - Enabled Drs in consultations with patients to focus on mission critical issues

The Right Health & Wellness Coach

For the GP, it is vital that to be confident and understand that a H&W Coach has the appropriate qualification. HCANZA standards ensure your practice is not at risk of the possibility for a breach of duty of care.

Importantly, Health & Wellness Coaches do not diagnose or prescribe, and like any member of staff or health consultant you work with, TRUST between you, your patient and the Health Coach is foundational to excellent patient outcomes.

HCANZA Health & Wellness Coaches have met the following requirements to become members:

- Have completed a coaching program (certificate or diploma) that has established science and competency-based learning program including practical experience. Minimum requirement is 75 hours usually over 6 – 12 months depending on extent of additional lifestyle or nutritional content in the course.
- During their training have demonstrated their ability to transfer their coaching skills (using a Coach Approach) through coaching labs with clients and or under supervision including an exam.
- Understand and demonstrate full knowledge of legal compliance with health guidelines (such as privacy etc) and ethical considerations including conflicts of interest, misleading and deceptive conduct.
- Commit to the HCANZA Scope of Practice and Code of Conduct
- Have current professional indemnity insurance as a Health Coach.
- Must complete CPD points within 12 months, distributed across the areas of business acumen, health related fields (nutrition, lifestyle or health sciences) and coaching.

AIMA and ACNEM by May this year, will have a direct link from their websites to the ‘ Find a Coach’ database on the HCANZA website to assist you identify qualified Health & Wellness Coach candidates.

How do you spot a non-registered Health Coach? Firstly, Health & Wellness Coaches that have met all of the above standards, once registered, will use the HCANZA Membership logo. So, look for the logo on their website or email signature. HCANZA is not a program provider, however all the details of national and international programs and standards can be found at www.hcanza.org- a good place to check the list for approved programs.

At present there are about 40 appropriately qualified Health & Wellness Coaches in Australia and New Zealand as the standard and the HCANZA establishes the industry position that number is increasing daily.

² Dubé, K., Willard-Grace, R., O’Connell, B., DeVore, D., Prado, C., Bodenheimer, T., Hessler, D., & Thom, D. H. (2015). Clinician perspectives on working with health coaches: A mixed methods approach. *Families, Systems, & Health*, 33(3), 213–221. <https://doi.org/10.1037/fsh0000110>

The Mayo Clinic is very clear on what properly qualified Coaches don't do:

- Diagnose syndromes or illnesses
- Coach on sports programs unless co-qualified
- Act as therapists or counsellors to their clients unless co qualified
- Give a 'prescription for health' or nutraceutical supplements
- Design a workout or a diet plan unless co qualified
- Administer expertise and give advice
- Share their personal wellness practices

Professional and consumer demand for transparent credentialing in the health and wellness coaching environment requires a collaborative industry response.

HCANZA as a membership organisation supported by key stakeholders, such as professional medical groups, is driving the industry focus on building and setting a credible self-regulatory framework and standard that will allow health and wellness coaching to continue to flourish.

Disclosure: Linda Funnell-Milner is the current Chair and Founding Director of Health Coach Australia & New Zealand.