



YOGA AUSTRALIA LTD. SUBMISSION:

CALL FOR EVIDENCE TO THE

AUSTRALIAN GOVERNMENT, DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH

NATURAL THERAPIES REVIEW 2019 – 2020

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CONTENTS

Contents.....	2
Introduction	3
What is Yoga?.....	4
Yoga in Australia.....	5
International and National Health Organisations Support of Yoga.....	6
World Health Organization	6
United Nations.....	6
Harvard Medical School.....	6
Johns Hopkins.....	7
Beyond Blue	7
Yoga Research	8
Australia’s Health	12
Conclusion	13

INTRODUCTION

This submission has been prepared by Yoga Australia Ltd., the peak advocacy organisation for yoga in Australia. Our purpose is to maintain the integrity and tradition of yoga by upholding the standards for the benefit of the whole community. We aim to ensure access to yoga for all Australian's so they can experience and enjoy the diverse benefits of yoga as a lifestyle and practice. Yoga Australia provides information and resources to its members, the media, medical and health professionals, educational organisations and the general public.

This document should be read in conjunction with the Yoga Australia Natural Therapies Review 2019-20 tranche 1 Yoga Evidence table. Yoga Australia Ltd. appreciates the opportunity to contribute to the Natural Therapies Review 2019-20.

WHAT IS YOGA?

Yoga is a system of mind-body techniques and guidance for enriched living. It is a complete lifestyle philosophy incorporating a combination of breathing techniques, physical postures, healthy lifestyle behaviours, meditation, relaxation, self-inquiry and mindfulness practices to restore balance and improve wellbeing. Regular yoga practice cultivates physical, emotional, mental and social health and wellbeing and may exert a healthy lifestyle effect including, healthy eating and lifestyle behaviours (e.g. no smoking, reduced alcohol consumption), increased exercise and reduced stress with resulting cost benefits to the community.

Yoga Therapy

Yoga therapy is the process of empowering individuals to progress toward improved health and wellbeing through the application of the teachings and practices of yoga. Therapists work with individuals one-on-one (or in small groups) applying these teachings and practices in a therapeutic context to support a consistent yoga practice that will increase self-awareness and engage the individual's energy in the direction of desired goals. The goals of yoga therapy include eliminating, reducing or managing symptoms that cause suffering; improving function; helping to prevent the occurrence or reoccurrence of underlying causes of illness; and moving toward improved health and wellbeing.

The practice of yoga therapy requires specialised training and skill development to support the relationship between the client/student and therapist and to effect positive change for the individual.¹

¹ The International Association of Yoga Therapists. July 2012. Educational Standards for the Training of Yoga Therapists: Definition of Yoga Therapy. pp1-19. Retrieved from https://cdn.ymaws.com/www.iayt.org/resource/resmgr/docs_articles/iaytdef_yogatherapy_ed_stand.pdf

YOGA IN AUSTRALIA

Yoga is one of Australia's most popular cardio, strength and flexibility exercises with 2.18 million Australians participating in yoga in the year to December 2017.

Yoga participation has continued to increase since mid-2016 when Roy Morgan found that 2 million Australians participated in the exercise. This level of participation is significantly higher than another popular exercise choice, Pilates, which now has 1.2 million participants and Aerobics with just over 1 million participants.

Over 1.7 million women do yoga regularly or occasionally compared to just under 480,000 men.

Yoga is most popular with Generation Y. Nearly 750,000 people, or 16%, of Generation Y do yoga regularly or occasionally compared to 13% of Generation Z, and 11% of Generation X.²

Yoga Australia provides some earlier statistics here:

<https://www.yogaaustralia.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2017/10/1.-Yoga-Participants.pdf>

In Australia, about 1 in six adults practise meditation; while 1 in 10 practise yoga. People often turn to yoga or meditation as a way to take time out and manage the stress of their day-to-day lives. Ongoing, high levels of stress can contribute to the onset of a range of psychological issues, such as depression and anxiety. Meditation and yoga have been shown to reduce people's self-reported levels of stress. This is likely due, at least in part, to the effects that meditation and yoga have on the brain's stress response system.³

² ROY MORGAN. Yoga participation stretches beyond Pilates & Aerobics. [online] Retrieved from <http://www.roymorgan.com/findings/7544-yoga-pilates-participation-december-2017-201803290641>

³ ABC NEWS. It's not all in your mind: Meditation affects the brain to help you stress less. [online] Retrieved from <https://www.abc.net.au/news/2018-08-22/meditation-how-it-affects-the-brain-to-help-you-stress-less/10148158>

INTERNATIONAL AND NATIONAL HEALTH ORGANISATIONS SUPPORT OF YOGA

Yoga is increasingly gaining recognition and support for its health benefits by leading organisations nationally and globally. A brief summary of some are provided below.

World Health Organization

WHO's recently released Global Action Plan on Physical Activity 2018-2030 endorsed the routine practice of yoga as a valuable tool for people of all ages to increase physical activity and decrease noncommunicable disease. Adding '*as Member States across the Region strive to reduce NCD-related premature mortality by a quarter by 2025, and one-third by 2030, yoga's full potential should be harnessed.*'⁴

United Nations

In 2017, the United Nations marked the International Day of Yoga essential to aspects of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development; highlighting the health benefits of yoga to ease the stress of our modern lives.⁵

Harvard Medical School

In 2016, Harvard Medical School released '*An Introduction to Yoga*' – a report outlining the health benefits of yoga. They suggest yoga can transform health on many different levels. They purport yoga to:

- improve balance, flexibility, strength, and coordination
- help reduce depression, anxiety, and stress and increase energy levels

⁴ WORLD HEALTH ORGANIZATION. Yoga is a valuable tool to increase physical activity and decrease noncommunicable disease. [online] Retrieved from <https://www.who.int/southeastasia/news/detail/20-06-2018-yoga-is-a-valuable-tool-to-increase-physical-activity-and-decrease-noncommunicable-disease>

⁵ UN NEWS. UN spotlights health benefits of yoga, ancient practice that can ease stress of our modern 'laptop' lives. [online] Retrieved from <https://news.un.org/en/story/2017/06/560092-un-spotlights-health-benefits-yoga-ancient-practice-can-ease-stress-our-modern>

- help reduce the risk of heart disease
- help alleviate arthritis and back pain
- increased blood vessel flexibility 69% and even helped shrink arterial blockages
- increase immunity by raising levels of natural, disease-fighting antioxidants in your body⁶

Johns Hopkins

Johns Hopkins Medicine supports the benefits of yoga for heart health. In '*The Yoga-Heart Connection*,' they highlight '*practicing yoga may help lower blood pressure, blood cholesterol and blood glucose levels, as well as heart rate, making it a useful lifestyle intervention.*' Further, they add '*the deep breathing and mental focus of yoga can offset this stress.*'⁷

Beyond Blue

National mental health organisation Beyond Blue, recognise the benefits of yoga to relax the mind and body and to manage some of the symptoms of anxiety and depression.

⁶ HARVARD HEALTH PUBLISHING HARVARD MEDICAL SCHOOL. Introduction to Yoga. [online] Retrieved from <https://www.health.harvard.edu/search?q=yoga>

⁷ JOHNS HOPKINS MEDICINE. The Yoga-Heart Connection. [online] Retrieved from <https://www.hopkinsmedicine.org/health/wellness-and-prevention/the-yoga-heart-connection>

YOGA RESEARCH

In recent years there have been a growing number of well-designed studies into the health benefits of yoga. These show that the practice of yoga is safe, useful and cost effective for a wide range of conditions and life-stages. Studies suggest benefits of yoga for health and wellness and for support during disease. Further, studies have demonstrated changes in biochemical indices, immune markers, hormones, metabolic markers etc.

The US Department of Health and Human Services National Center for Complementary and Integrative Health offer the following top-line summary of some of the research supporting the health benefits of yoga.⁸

Stress and Mental Health

Studies have suggested possible benefits of yoga for several aspects of wellness, including stress management.⁹

Many studies have found evidence of benefits, such as improvements in resilience or general mental well-being in those with mental ill-health, including depression, PTSD, anxiety),^{10 11 12 13 14}

⁸ NATIONAL CENTER FOR COMPLEMENTARY AND INTEGRATIVE HEALTH. *Yoga: What You Need to Know*. [online] Retrieved from <https://nccih.nih.gov/health/yoga/introduction.htm>

⁹ Sharma M. Yoga as an alternative and complementary approach for stress management: a systematic review. *Journal of Evidence-Based Complementary and Alternative Medicine*. 2014;19(1):59-67.

¹⁰ Cramer H, Anheyer D, Lauche R, et al. A systematic review of yoga for major depressive disorder. *Journal of Affective Disorders*. 2017;213:70-77.

¹¹ Cramer H, Lauche R, Anheyer D, et al. Yoga for anxiety: a systematic review and meta-analysis of randomized controlled trials. *Depression and Anxiety*. 2018;35(9):830-843.

¹² Domingues RB. Modern postural yoga as a mental health promoting tool: a systematic review. *Complementary Therapies in Clinical Practice*. 2018;31:248-255.

¹³ Chugh-Gupta N, Baldassarre FG, Vrkljan BH. A systematic review of yoga for state anxiety: Considerations for occupational therapy. *Canadian Journal of Occupational Therapy*. 2013;80(3):150-170.

¹⁴ Cramer H, Anheyer D, Saha FJ, et al. Yoga for posttraumatic stress disorder – a systematic review and meta-analysis. *BMC Psychiatry*. 2018;18:72.

Sleep

Yoga has been shown to be helpful for sleep in several population groups, including people with arthritis, pregnant women, and women with menopause symptoms.^{15 16}

Promoting Healthy Eating/Activity Habits

Practicing yoga regularly has been associated with better eating and physical activity habits. Yoga participants report healthier habits through greater mindfulness, motivation to participate in other forms of activity and eat healthier, and the influence of a health-minded yoga community.¹⁷

Balance

Several studies looking at the effect of yoga on balance in healthy people demonstrate improvements in at least one balance-related outcome.¹⁸

Weight

Some evidence suggests that yoga-based weight control programs support gradual, moderate reductions in weight ¹⁹ and that practicing yoga was associated with **reduced** body mass index.²⁰

Blood Pressure

Hypertension control remains a major global challenge. The behavioural approaches recommended for blood pressure reduction are stress reduction, increased exercise

¹⁵ Beddoe AE, Lee KA, Weiss SJ, et al. Effects of mindful yoga on sleep in pregnant women: a pilot study. *Biological Research for Nursing*. 2010;11(4):363-370.

¹⁶ Taibi DM, Vitiello MV. A pilot study of gentle yoga for sleep disturbance in women with osteoarthritis. *Sleep Medicine*. 2011;12(5):512-517.

¹⁷ Watts AW, Rydell SA, Eisenberg ME, et al. Yoga's potential for promoting healthy eating and physical activity behaviors among young adults: a mixed-methods study. *International Journal of Behavioral Nutrition and Physical Activity*. 2018;15:42.

¹⁸ Jeter PE, Nkodo AF, Moonaz SH, et al. A systematic review of yoga for balance in a healthy population. *Journal of Alternative and Complementary Medicine*. 2014;20(4):221-232.

¹⁹ Rioux JG, Ritenbaugh C. Narrative review of yoga intervention clinical trials including weight-related outcomes. *Alternative Therapies in Health and Medicine*. 2013;19(3):32-46.

²⁰ Lauche R, Langhorst J, Lee MS, et al. A systematic review and meta-analysis on the effects of yoga on weight-related outcomes. *Preventive Medicine*. 2016;87:213-232.

and healthy dietary habits. Study findings suggest that yoga has a beneficial effect in reducing blood pressure.²¹

Pain

The American College of Physicians recommends using nondrug methods for the initial treatment of chronic low-back pain. Yoga is one of several suggested nondrug approaches.²² Yoga has been offered as a non-invasive, nonpharmacological treatment for chronic pain.²³

Practicing yoga reduced both the intensity of neck pain and disability related to neck pain and improved range of motion in the neck.²⁴

Benefits have been observed in veterans and low-income minority participants with chronic back pain.^{25 26}

Cancer

In an evaluation of studies on the use of yoga in patients with various types of cancer, most found that yoga improved patients' physical and psychological symptoms and quality of life.^{27 28}

Further, in those with breast cancer and survivors, many found moderate-quality evidence that yoga helped reduce fatigue and sleep disturbances and improved

²¹ Wu Y, Johnson BT, Acabchuk RL, Chen S, Lewis HK, Livingston J, Park CL, Pescatello LS. Yoga as Antihypertensive Lifestyle Therapy: A Systematic Review and Meta-analysis. *Mayo Clin Proc.* 2019 Mar;94(3):432-446. doi: 10.1016/j.mayocp.2018.09.023. Epub 2019 Feb 18.

²² Qaseem A, Wilt TJ, McLean RM, et al. Non-invasive treatments for acute, subacute, and chronic low back pain: a clinical practice guideline from the American College of Physicians. *Annals of Internal Medicine.* 2017;166(7):514-530.

²³ Skelly AC, Chou R, Dettori JR, et al. Non-invasive Non-pharmacological Treatment for Chronic Pain: A Systematic Review. *Comparative Effectiveness Review no. 209.* Rockville, MD: Agency for Healthcare Research and Quality; 2018. AHRQ publication no. 18-EHC013-EF.

²⁴ Li Y, Li S, Jiang J, et al. Effects of yoga on patients with chronic nonspecific neck pain. A PRISMA systematic review and meta-analysis. *Medicine.* 2019;98(8):e14649.

²⁵ Groessl EJ, Weingart KR, Johnson N, et al. The benefits of yoga for women veterans with chronic low back pain. *Journal of Alternative and Complementary Medicine.* 2012;18(9):832-838.

²⁶ Keosaian JE, Lemaster CM, Dresner D, et al. "We're all in this together": A qualitative study of predominantly low-income minority participants in a yoga trial for chronic low back pain. *Complementary Therapies in Medicine.* 2016;24:34-39.

²⁷ Agarwal RP, Maroko-Afek A. Yoga into cancer care: a review of the evidence-based research. *International Journal of Yoga.* 2018;11(1):3-29.

²⁸ Lin PJ, Peppone LJ, Janelsins MC, et al. Yoga for the management of cancer treatment-related toxicities. *Current Oncology Reports.* 2018;20(1):5

health-related quality of life. The effects of yoga were similar to those of other types of exercise and better than those of educational programs.²⁹

Chronic obstructive pulmonary disease (COPD)

There is evidence that yoga can improve physical ability (such as being able to walk a defined distance in a defined time), lung function, and quality of life in people with COPD.³⁰

Please refer to attached table for additional (yet not complete) available research studies exploring yoga.

Limitations in the Research

Yoga Australia Ltd. recognises the methodological limitations of some of the current available research (e.g. varying approaches to yoga used; the duration of practice; the quality of the studies; their ability to be reproduced; the introduction of biases; low participant numbers; type of control group; outcomes measures assessed; etc.); however, interest and support for further research continues to grow and receive funding. Further, large, reputable research institutions and universities are leading the research, which will increase the credibility of studies overall. The quality of research will continue to improve and build upon that which has already been conducted, which, as indicated, shows promise in yoga having an effect on health and wellness as well as disease states across a range of conditions.

²⁹ Cramer H, Lauche R, Klose P, et al. Yoga for improving health-related quality of life, mental health and cancer-related symptoms in women diagnosed with breast cancer. Cochrane Database of Systematic Reviews. 2017;(1):CD010802. Accessed at www.cochranelibrary.com(link is external) on June 7, 2018.

³⁰ Li C, Liu Y, Ji Y, et al. Efficacy of yoga training in chronic obstructive pulmonary disease patients: a systematic review and meta-analysis. *Complementary Therapies in Clinical Practice*. 2018;30:33-37.

AUSTRALIA'S HEALTH

The Australian Government Australian Institute of Health and Welfare Australia's health 2018 report provided a snapshot of the health of Australians. Almost two-thirds (63%) of Australians aged 18 and over, and more than one-quarter (28%) of children aged 5–17 are overweight or obese. Further, 1 in 3 (6 million) Australian adults have high blood pressure. Mental health was an area of concern, the rates of cancer and other chronic conditions continues to rise and there is a growing demand for end-of-life care.³¹

As highlighted in the report, health behaviours are crucial; small lifestyle changes such as, giving up smoking, cutting back risky levels of alcohol consumption, or maintaining a normal weight—can lead to health gains with lifelong effects for individuals and the community. Further, eating a healthy diet and getting enough exercise can reduce the risk of overweight and obesity, high blood pressure and developing chronic conditions.

The research suggests that regular yoga practice can offer support across all of these public health concerns.

³¹ Australian Institute of Health and Welfare 2018. Australia's health 2018: in brief. Cat. no. AUS 222. Canberra: AIHW

CONCLUSION

Yoga is a cost-effective, safe, efficacious practice that is accessible to any person regardless of age, ability or health state. It offers a range of health benefits and the skills and resources to support positive lifestyle behavioural change towards behaviours that promote health and reduce the risk of disease.

On behalf of its members, the President and CEO of Yoga Australia wish to express their support for this review to assess additional available evidence for Natural Therapies and urges serious consideration be given to the inclusion of yoga for rebate on private health insurance.

Please do not hesitate to contact us with any comments or questions or to request further information.

Yours sincerely,

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