



MASSAGE & MYOTHERAPY

AUSTRALIA

A skilled workforce - ready to contribute

A submission in response

to

Our Healthcare Future

Advancing Tasmania's Health

Exposure Draft

June 2022



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 Advancing Tasmania’s Health
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To whom it may concern

Thank you for the opportunity to add our perspective to ‘Our Health Future – Advancing Tasmania’s Health: Exposure Draft June 2022’.

Remedial and therapeutic massage therapy and myotherapy (massage therapy) are a small part of Tasmania’s health services mix. However, the growing demand for these services alongside the large body of evidence attesting to its efficacy, and some integration of massage healthcare services that is already occurring in numerous health settings around Tasmania provides a sound foundation for considering how massage therapy might contribute further to advancing Tasmania’s health service.

As listed in the summary table below, massage therapists and myotherapists (massage therapists) work in multiple health settings, providing much needed relief from the symptoms of pain and stress, and in doing so help to facilitate patient centred care, recovery and maintenance services throughout Tasmania’s local the communities.

Disease and injury	Dysfunction and pain	Emotion
palliative conditions, i.e., cancer	postural & thoracic	neural tension
muscular tears & strains	sacroiliac, lumbar & hip	tension & stress
tendonitis & tendinopathy	neck & shoulder	relaxation
surgery recovery	reduced range of motion	headaches
	reduced fitness & strength	restlessness

Importantly, Tasmanian’s are already making the choice to access professional massage services in their community, so we are particularly encouraged by the Strategic Ambitions detailed in the Exposure Draft.

In this submission, ‘A skilled workforce – Ready to Contribute’ we outline numerous issues to consider in relation to Strategic Ambitions 1,2 and 4, if massage therapists are to make an even more valuable contribution to achieving the six Strategic Ambitions.

Yours sincerely

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 CEO



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Background

Who is Massage & Myotherapy Australia?

Massage & Myotherapy Australia (the Association) is the massage sector's leader and driving force towards evidenced-based massage and myotherapy services.

Massage & Myotherapy Australia is a not-for-profit organisation formed in 2003. The Association is the leading representative body for massage therapists, remedial massage therapists and myotherapists nationwide.

We currently serve over 8,600 professionally-qualified member therapists who must meet various requirements that are in line with the registration requirements for Allied Health and Medical practitioners. These include:

- holding a current qualification from an Australian Registered Training Organisation (RTO)
- holding current Senior/Level 2 First Aid Qualifications
- holding current Malpractice, Public Liability Insurance (minimum \$2,000,000)
- completing a statutory declaration, indicating that they have not been charged with or convicted of an offence of harm to a person, nor been subject to disciplinary proceedings with a Private Health Fund or other association
- adhering to the National Code of Conduct for Unregistered Health Workers and the Association's Code of Conduct, which is overseen by an independent Ethics Committee
- undergoing continuing professional education to a specified number of hours each year.

Why is the Association making this submission?

Professional qualified therapists work in both clinical and non-clinical health.

Our submission only refers to remedial massage therapists and myotherapists who have recognised qualifications such as Bachelor Degrees in Health Science, Advanced Diploma or Diploma, are a registered member of a professional association and who undertake at least 1,000 hours of specialty training.

It is with these professional therapists that the opportunity lies to augment access to community preventative, residential, rehabilitation and palliative care services as a service recognised by Primary Health Tasmania.

Addressing the Strategic Ambitions

Strategic Ambition 1: Better and More Accessible Community Care

There is a need to ensure appropriately trained and skilled massage therapists are available in the coming future.

Clinical service planning should be made for the adequate provision, training and availability of professional massage therapists at the local level and in clinical settings.

Scattered throughout the Tasmanian community, qualified massage therapists work in integrated settings, involving hospitals, general practice, community health centres, private clinics, palliative care, aged and residential care facilities, and in the home.

Recognised as a skills shortage, by the Department of Immigration; the [Industry Reference Committee](#) (IRC), which reported to the [Australian Industry and Skills Committee](#) (AISC) during 2019, found that shortages, within the Complementary Health sector, are seen to be manifesting in insufficiently trained practitioners. Increasingly, therapists work on clients with complex and/or multiple conditions. More advanced clinical skills training is required in this type of massage

The Reference Committee 2019¹, reported that over recent times treatment practices for massage therapists, as well as the wider Complementary Health professional workforce, have evolved significantly.

‘Such change has resulted in evolving skill and competence requirements for the workforce. The sector overall has been experiencing several challenges which are impacting workforce skill requirements and in summary include:

- Government policy/legislation
- An ageing workforce
- Skills shortages
- Employment status and earnings.

To address workforce skills issues, the Complementary Health IRC identified qualifications which require further investigation and consultation within the sector. The areas covered by the qualifications are:

- Massage Therapy and Remedial Massage Therapy (two existing qualifications and one new qualification)
- Ingestive modalities (four new qualifications in Naturopathy, Western Herbal Medicine, Nutrition and Homeopathy)’

The ageing of the population and the growing incidents of chronic musculoskeletal disease, and mental health issues, is driving growing demand for professional massage services and evolving skills².

However, Tasmania’s skilled migration program assigns low priority to massage therapists, only giving weight to claims from appropriately qualified practitioners in a clinical setting such as a hospital, aged or disability care or an allied health practice.

Strategic Ambition 2: Strengthening prevention

Actions to support Tasmanians to be more connected in their communities, have positive mental health and wellbeing, limit harmful alcohol use, be smoke free, eat well, and live more active lives should consider an increased role for massage therapists.

Massage therapy is already used to help overcome the barriers to improving health and wellbeing.

The qualifications and conditions treated by massage and myotherapists are listed in Table 1, which also provides an initial guide as to the conditions and the areas in which massage therapists can help to overcome the barriers to achieving healthier more active lives, reduce the incidents of preventable disease, and better support people living with chronic conditions, or disabilities.

Condition	Cert IV	Diploma	Advanced Diploma or Degree
Stress	✓	✓	✓
Relaxation	✓	✓	✓
Tension	✓	✓	✓
Headaches	✓	✓	✓
Muscular tears	✓	✓	✓
Postural dysfunction	✓	✓	✓
Neck dysfunction and pain		✓	✓
Thoracic dysfunction and pain		✓	✓
Lumbar dysfunction and pain		✓	✓
Sacroiliac dysfunction and pain		✓	✓
Shoulder dysfunction and pain		✓	✓
Hip dysfunction and pain		✓	✓
Tendonitis/Tendinopathy		✓	✓
Muscular strain		✓	✓
Reduced range of motion		✓	✓
Palliative conditions such as cancer		✓	✓
Neural tension			✓
Reduced fitness			✓
Reduced strength			✓

Table 1 Massage qualifications and conditions treated

The lists in Table 1 demonstrates that qualified remedial massage therapists and myotherapists provide an opportunity for General Practitioners and other primary care health professionals to access staff with specialist skills who can assist in the management of chronic and complex healthcare conditions.

While physical exercise is known to improve mental and physical health, the close associations between limitations in physical function and psychological distress highlight special needs among individuals experiencing daily functional limitations.³

Importantly, significant research indicates that massage can provide a cost-effective bridge to recovery plans involving physical exercise.

A 2016⁴ meta-analysis of Randomised Controlled Trials concluded that, based on the evidence, massage therapy, compared to no treatment, should be strongly recommended as a pain management option.

A US econometric analysis⁵ examined how the inclusion of massage therapy services, as part of an integrative care approach, can help lower costs for certain conditions and types of treatments. The 2014 study found that of the 19 outpatient treatments studied, massage was associated with lower overall treatment costs in 16 of these treatments.

Another study⁶ found that patients who had a general practitioner with additional complementary and alternative medicine training had lower health care costs and mortality rates than those who did not. Reduced costs come from fewer hospital stays and fewer prescription drugs.

The Canadian Institute of Work and Health concluded that massage was most effective for lower back pain when combined with education and exercise, and when administered by a licensed therapist.⁷

Strategic Ambition 3: Partnering with Consumers and Clinicians

There is opportunity to improve access to care in the community.

Massage therapists already play an important role in working with priority populations, in cooperation with general practitioners and allied health.

Qualified therapists, with the appropriate clinical training and skills, provide a state-wide, local complementary health care work force to assist in the management of conditions through integrated clinics and healthcare services.

A 2018 survey⁸ that sampled the Australian population found bodywork therapists were the most commonly consulted complementary practitioners, with massage therapists representing 20.7% of consultations, compared to allied health chiropractors 12.6%.

A national workforce survey⁹ found that there are high levels of support for massage therapies among Australian GPs, relative to other CAM professions, with low levels of opposition to the incorporation of these therapies in patient care.

- GPs (76.6%) referred to massage therapy at least a few times per year
- 12.5% of GPs referred at least once per week
- 95% of GPs believed in the efficacy of massage therapy
- 95% of GPs perceived a lack of other treatment options
- 95% of GPs who had prescribed any complementary and alternative medicine previously were all independently predictive of increased referrals to massage therapy
- GPs were more likely to refer a patient to a massage therapist if they had obtained their medical training in Australia.

Additionally, a [2019 USA study](#)¹⁰ reported that *'massage is the most often recommended therapy at 30%, with women being the highest referrals. Researchers found that 'overall, more than half of office-based physicians recommended at least one CHA to their patients. Female physicians recommended every individual CHA at a higher rate than male physicians except for chiropractic and osteopathic manipulation. These findings may enable consumers, physicians, and medical schools to better understand potential differences in use of CHAs with patients'*.

Strategic Ambition 4: Building the Health Workforce

The skills and competencies of professional massage therapists are undervalued because massage therapy is not recognised as a standalone modality or therapy.

Consideration should be given to the inclusion of massage and myotherapy administered by qualified massage therapists involving a preapproved schedule of specific modalities and scope of practice for given conditions.

This is perpetuated by government funded Allied Health professionals who can include massage in a treatment for a condition, without specific documentation and reporting in terms of its efficacy.

This enables funded massage to be provided by Allied Health practitioners such as midwives, nurses, physiotherapists or chiropractors as an adjunct modality, but rarely documented in their patient or client notes or any other data collection or public record. Patient responses concerning how they feel or the evaluation of massage techniques and modalities used, are rarely gathered, measured, or assessed through follow-up patient evaluation.

Hence, the value of massage treatments in these settings is unclear and unacknowledged by the wider health community despite patients regularly seeking out the services of professional massage therapists, in preference to other care and treatments.

This contravenes best practice and perpetuates a lack of:

- appropriate scrutiny in terms of who, when and how massage is applied
- documentation about the results that these therapies achieve in helping improve a client's condition
- accurate and specific data collection and reporting pertaining to the practitioner who delivers massage and myotherapy treatments
- accurate and specific reporting and data collection concerning the massage modalities used to treat given conditions
- any clear understanding of the contribution massage makes to recovery and management of conditions treated
- accurate data or evidence to support legislative reform.

We are not suggesting that massage therapists or myotherapists depose the role of Allied Health services.

The presence of massage in private and public care settings often occurs on an ad-hoc basis as organisations either respond to consumer demand, or massage is championed by key personnel within the organisation. These personnel are motivated by the effectiveness of massage therapy as evidenced in the scientific literature or from anecdotal and personal experiences related by clients.

However, while specialist remedial massage therapists and myotherapists already provide a valuable role in helping people maintain mobility, achieve pain reduction and aid in reducing stress their contribution is unacknowledged and underutilised.

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