

Identifying Professional Massage Therapists

FACT SHEET 2



About this fact sheet

Massage therapists, remedial massage therapists and myotherapists (massage therapist or therapist), often fill the gap when patients seek alternatives to medications and other therapies because they feel that massage therapy provides a level of relief that is appropriate to their needs.

The following provides information to General Practitioners and other registered health professionals when seeking a professional massage therapist. As with all health-related therapies, no two people respond in the same way and no two therapists can provide a massage in the same way. Understand the training, skills and specialisations of massage therapists will help you find and refer patients to an appropriate professional therapist.

Massage therapy or myotherapy may or may not be right for a patient. Finding professional, qualified therapists that you have confidence in, because they have the appropriate training, experience and skills needed, will assist in developing multidisciplinary pain management plans.

Core standards similar to AHPRA Registered Practitioners

The core standards required of professional massage therapists accredited as members of a professional association are very similar to the the five core registration standards of the [Australian Health Practitioner Regulation Agency \(AHPRA\)](#) for the 16 registered health professions.

These include: Criminal History Police Checks, English language skills, Recency of practice, and Continuing professional development. Professional association membership requires Public and Products Liability Insurance, and Professional Indemnity Insurance.

AHPRA-registered health practitioners are also required to adhere to [Codes and Guidelines](#), while professional massage therapists must adhere to a [Professional Code of Ethics and Standards of Practice](#). [Complaints and concerns](#) can be raised about AHPRA-registered practitioners, as they can be about professional massage therapists through an independent [National Ethics Committee](#), and underpinned by the [National Code of Conduct for Healthcare Workers](#). This Code of Conduct includes state-based health complaints commissioners and health ombudsmen with cross-jurisdictional information-sharing powers.

Membership arrangements operated by various professional Associations include:

- » set qualification and probity standards for membership
- » accredited training programs for membership purposes
- » ongoing professional development/education requirements
- » Current First Aid and, in some cases,
- » Criminal History Check and Working With Children/ Vulnerable Persons Check
- » Third party complaint resolution involving:
 - a code of ethics that members must subscribe to
 - complaints handling services involving health service users about members
 - sanctions for unprofessional conduct, including withdrawal of membership in serious cases.

Like registered health practitioners, massage therapists must also comply with the requirements of Health Insurance Funds to achieve accreditation as an [Approved Provider](#).

Significant changes in the professionalism of accredited massage therapists

The Complementary Health [Industry Reference Committee \(IRC\)](#) 2019¹ reports 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 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 available in this type of massage.

Despite being an unregulated area of healthcare, during the past 10 years, much has happened in the professional massage and myotherapy sector to bring it more in line with the professional expectations and standards of Allied Health professionals and Registered medical practitioners.

These changes include:

- » National Code of Conduct for Healthcare Workers
- » State-based health complaints commissioners and health ombudsmen with cross jurisdictional information sharing powers.
- » Review of the Australian Government Rebate on Natural Therapies for Private Health Insurance which recommended the continued inclusion of massage (2015)
- » Creation of a complementary therapies research program – UTS – ARCCIM International Complementary Medicine Research Leadership Program
- » Creation of a new ACCC endorsed national Quality Assurance program for professional massage therapists and myotherapists (Certified Specialist®)
- » A considerable number of newly published papers attesting to the efficacy of massage in alleviating symptoms of pain and stress and as an aid to maintaining and improving mobility in the aged, those with injuries and those suffering chronic pain or stress.

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Massage therapists assist in three main areas

Qualified therapists generally use an integrated approach, drawing on a variety of techniques and adjunct services to assist in addressing a specific condition. These conditions include disease and injury, dysfunction and pain, and emotional issues as listed in Table 1 below:

Disease & Injury	Dysfunction & 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

Table 1: Conditions for which massage is applied.

Professional massage therapist have recognised qualifications

A report published by Endeavour College during February 2021² and undertaken by Australian Online Research, reported on the education levels of therapists for whom massage services was their primary source of income. These are illustrated below in Figure 1. *Qualifications:*

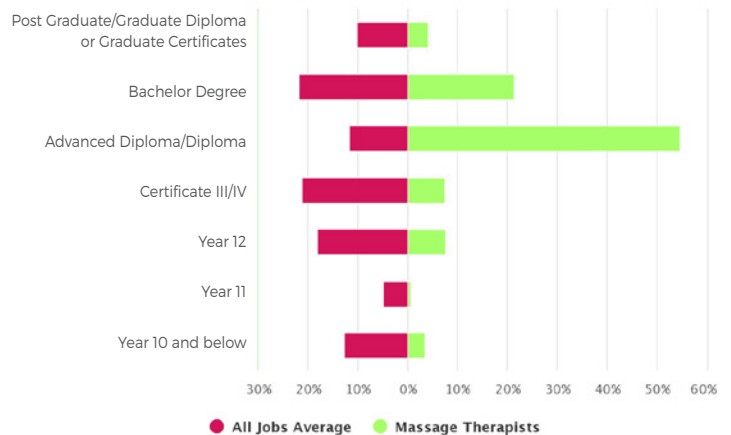


Figure 1. Qualifications

In 2017, [Steel et al³](#) described the Australian complementary medicine workforce, including practice and professional characteristics, involving over 1,300 practitioners. They found that most participants obtained their qualification 10 or more years ago and practiced in a clinical environment alongside at least one other health practitioner from another health profession.

Endnotes

1. [Complementary Health 2019 Industry Reference Committee](#), Industry Skills Forecast, SkillsIQ
2. Fine B, Monica Gessner M, Myotherapy Research Summary, Endeavour Interview Participant Pack, [Australia Online Research](#), February 2021
3. Steel A, Leach M, Wardle J, Sibbritt D, Schloss J, Diezel H, Adams J. The Australian Complementary Medicine Workforce: [A Profile of 1,306 Practitioners from the PRACI Study](#), *J Altern Complement Med.* 2018 Apr;24(4):385-394. doi: 10.1089/acm.2017.0206. Epub 2018 Jan 2. PMID: 29293360.