



Canadian Massage
Therapist Alliance

Alliance Canadienne
de Massothérapeutes

National Standards of Practice

The Practice of Massage Therapy in Canada

The Canadian Massage Therapist Alliance has developed this document to ensure consistent high standards of care across Canada. In provinces in which massage therapy is a regulated health profession, this is the function of the regulatory colleges who establish standards of care, which take precedence over this document. In unregulated provinces, where appropriate, the standards of practice established by the appropriate provincial associations take precedence. This document provides an overall guide and standard for the profession of massage therapy across Canada.

Massage Therapy

The practice of massage therapy is the assessment of the Musculoskeletal system of the body and the treatment and prevention of physical dysfunction, injury and pain by manipulation, mobilization and other manual methods to develop, maintain, rehabilitate or augment physical function, relieve pain or promote health. Massage therapy is a clinically-oriented healthcare option that helps alleviate the Musculoskeletal disorders associated with everyday stress, physical manifestation of mental distress, muscular overuse and many persistent pain syndromes.

Massage Therapists

Massage therapists are primary health care professionals who consult and collaborate with their patients and other health care professionals to provide patient-centered care. Massage therapists ensure that the patients receive the highest quality evidence-based care in the treatment, management and prevention of Musculoskeletal dysfunction and disorders. Massage therapists contribute to the reduction of pain and the rehabilitation of musculoskeletal dysfunctions to ensure maximization of function and improved quality of life.

Massage Therapy in Canada

Massage therapy is governed by provincially-legislated regulatory and registration authorities. Massage therapy is a regulated health profession in the provinces of Ontario, British Columbia, Newfoundland and Labrador, and New Brunswick.

In the aforementioned provinces, there are established regulatory authorities (Colleges) which regulate the standards of practice and conduct of massage therapists to protect the public interest. In the other provinces and territories in Canada, the profession of massage therapy is not regulated by the provincial government. However, in each jurisdiction, there is a professional association for massage therapy that has established standards of practice and act for the public interest.

Education

Massage therapy diploma programs are offered at a number of community colleges as well as private career colleges. Upon graduation, a licensing examination process is in place. In regulated provinces, the respective colleges have adopted the Inter-Jurisdictional Practice Competencies and Performance Indicators, which creates a common, inter-jurisdictional entry-to-practice standard, reflective of the uniformity of massage therapy practice in the regulated provinces in Canada. The practice competencies establish the minimum requirement for newly-registered massage therapists who are entering practice for the first time and ensure their ability to practice in a manner that is safe, effective and ethical. The licensing examinations are administered by the Colleges in the regulated provinces. In unregulated provinces, specific provincial associations either administer entry-to-practice examinations or require that members undertake such an examination in a regulated or associated province, as a requirement of membership to those unregulated provincial associations. There are specific exceptions to the requirement for an examination process in specific provinces. In general, a diploma that meets the educational requirements set by the Inter-jurisdictional Practice Competencies and Performance Indicators requires a minimum of 2,200-hour massage program.

Massage Therapy Practice

Massage therapists function in both individual practice and collaboratively through an inter-professional team-based approach. Massage therapy interventions complement those of other health professionals and massage therapists understand and respect the roles, responsibilities and differing perspectives of other health professionals. Massage therapists work collaboratively with other health professionals within interdisciplinary teams and communicate relevant information to those individuals within the patient's circle of care to achieve the optimal level of patient care.

Massage therapy is an important part of a health care regimen. There are significant benefits to be achieved through the use of massage therapy treatments including, but not limited to, reducing or eliminating pain, improving joint mobility and circulation, reducing the physical symptoms presented by depression and anxiety, chronic stress, reducing muscular tension and improving lymphedema.

Patients may seek care from a massage therapist for a variety of acute and chronic conditions, and massage therapists can work with a wide variety of patients in the treatment of illness, injury rehabilitation and disability.

The first visit to a massage therapist includes a comprehensive patient intake process, comprising of confidential health history information and informed consent. This involves setting realistic goals for treatment, discussing possible responses to treatment, and being informed of alternate care options. An objective physical assessment in conjunction with subjective information is used to determine potential and actual impairments, pain, functional limitations, and other limitations. Upon analysis of the assessment, the massage therapist will develop a treatment plan with the patient to ensure that the appropriate treatment is provided.

Evidence-Informed Decision Making

Evidence-informed decision making involves integrating the best available research evidence into the decision-making process. Evidence integrated into massage therapy practice uses research findings from a variety of manual therapy and rehabilitation disciplines. Massage therapists are also able to interpret and apply relevant research within the environment in which they practice.

Standards of Practice

The Canadian Massage Therapist Alliance has developed national standards of practice for massage therapists in all provinces and territories across Canada. The standards describe the expectations for professional behavior and conduct to ensure high-quality, safe and ethical delivery of care. The standards are founded on the values, principles and practice of the profession of massage therapy. The national standards of practice for the profession of massage therapy incorporate federal and provincial legislation and regulations. These standards are based on the Inter-Jurisdictional Practice Competencies and Performance Indicators for Massage Therapists, established in 2012 and adopted by the regulatory Colleges in Canada for competency examinations. These standards are intended to provide an overall definition of the benchmark performance expectations for massage therapists practicing in Canada.

Practice Environment

- Universal hygiene precautions for infection control and public health must be followed at all times.
- The area to be used for the practice of massage therapy shall be clean and free of impediments to ensure adequate space for safe movement and comfort.
- Massage therapy equipment and supplies shall be properly maintained and disinfected.
- There shall be separate areas for the patient and massage therapist to prepare for and engage in the practice of massage therapy.

Provision of Information and Consent

- Informed consent requires massage therapists to discuss with the patient information about the benefits, risks and potential side effects of massage therapy treatment.
- Massage therapists must communicate the findings of the assessment and treatment recommendations including proposed treatments or procedures to the patient that are based on their presenting complaint, health history and objective and subjective assessment to ensure the patient is informed of the treatment plan.
- All decisions regarding the initiation of a treatment program will be made jointly with the patient, or when necessary, with the patient's advocate.
- A record of informed consent to treatment is obtained voluntarily from the patient, or the patient's advocate indicating the patient's consent to treatment and must not be based on fraudulent or misrepresented information.
- It is the patient's right to refuse or terminate treatment at any time, regardless of prior consent.
- Written consent to disclose personal health information must be obtained prior to sharing any portion of the patient's health record with a third party or other health care practitioner.
 - If a request for a release of the patient health record is made by the third party, the patient must be immediately informed of the request and explicit consent provided.
 - All third party requests must be reasonable and relating to the specific reasons for treatment, and specifics relating to the frequency, duration, and clinical outcomes.
- Provincial legislation outlines compliance requirements for health care consent.

Patient Health Records

- Patient health records must be dated, accurate, legible and comprehensive and must include the following:
 - Personal information including patient name, address, phone number(s), date of birth, source of referral (if any), and name and address of primary care physician.
 - Health history information including general health status, primary complaint or area of focus, location and nature of pain or discomfort, contributing factors, current medications use and purpose, allergies or hypersensitivity reactions, timing and nature of injuries, accidents or surgical procedures, limitations on daily life, history of massage therapy, current involvement in treatment with other health care practitioner(s).
 - Assessment and reassessment findings based on history, observation, palpation, movement, neurology, referred sensation and special tests as relevant and including acute and chronic conditions or pain, range of motion, evidence of tenderness or tension, potential risks of treatment and consultation with or referral to another health care professional if clinical reasoning or contraindications to massage therapy exist or a more desirable outcome would be achieved through that referral.
 - Treatment plan based on clinical findings containing patient goals, all proposed treatment methods and areas of focus, anticipated frequency and duration of treatments, and anticipated patient responses to treatment.
 - Records of ongoing treatment based on relevant research and evidence, patient education, recommendations for home care as relevant, treatment outcomes, relevant

changes in patient status and all other required elements as listed by the provincial regulatory colleges or provincial association where appropriate.

- Documentation relating to the provision of consent (see Provision of Information and Consent Standard above)
- Must be compliant with the requirements for the protection, privacy and security of records as set out in the Personal Information Protection and Electronic Document Act, and the respective provincial health information privacy legislation and all other relevant legal requirements.
- Records must be confidential and safely and securely stored to protect against reasonably anticipated threats or hazards to the security, integrity, loss or unauthorized use, disclosure, modification or unauthorized access to health information.
- Records must be stored in Canada and, if in digital format, stored on servers based in Canada.
- Records must be maintained and accessible according to the appropriate provincial requirement. Massage therapists must retain personal possession of the records, or have access to those records, or make arrangements for a custodian to assume this responsibility.
- Records may only be released if the request to release records has a basis in law or the patient has expressly consented to such release including the full scope of the request.

Clinical Practice

- Undressing, draping and re-dressing procedures must be explained to the patient and agreed upon. This includes:
 - Reasoning for removal of clothing and respect for the patient's right to decline the removal of certain or any clothing.
 - Ensuring privacy while the patient disrobes or dresses, out of the view of the massage therapist and other people.
 - Instructing the patient on safely getting on and off the table and advising of the use of sheets to cover themselves once they are in position for treatment.
 - Providing non-transparent draping materials, and arranging and securing draping so that only the part of the patient's body that is being assessed or treated is exposed.
- The patient is told the nature and purpose of the proposed assessment/reassessment and/or treatment including areas of the body involved
- The massage therapist shall engage in therapeutic communication with the patient to determine the level of comfort as it relates to pressure and depth of touch, as well as general patient comfort including positioning.

Financial Accountability

- A posted schedule of fees and services must be readily available for current and potential patients.
- Policies and procedures regarding payment and fees for missed or cancelled appointments must be readily available.
- Fees for a proposed course of treatment must be congruent with displayed fee schedule and must be reviewed in detail with patient prior to commencement of treatment.

- Individual financial consideration for deviation from the fee schedule may be applied at the discretion of the massage therapist and documented in the clinical notes indicating the reasoning and agreement.
- The patient is entitled to an official receipt for all payments made to the massage therapist. Each receipt will include the date of treatment, treatment provided, and fee received. The massage therapist's name, registration or provider number and signature are required on all receipts along with all other requirements as outlined by the provincial regulatory college or association where appropriate.

Professional Conduct

- Massage therapists shall maintain personal hygiene and professional appearance.
- Massage therapists shall differentiate between personal and professional beliefs and behaviours.
- Massage therapists shall utilize professional oral and written communication.
- Massage therapists shall apply conflict resolution strategies as appropriate.
- Massage therapists shall demonstrate a commitment to life-long learning.
- Massage therapists shall conduct themselves with honesty and engage, employing appropriate relations, with patients by acknowledging the inherent imbalance of power by virtue of therapist authority and patient vulnerability.
- Massage therapists shall maintain patient confidentiality and trust at all times as appropriate to the therapeutic and fiduciary responsibilities.
- Massage Therapists shall listen to and respect the patient's values, opinions, and cultural beliefs.
- Massage therapists shall be alert to and report, as required, any unethical practice by any member of the regulated health professions.
- Massage therapists shall always act in patients' best interests as defined by the patient's wishes and consistent with the standards of practice of the profession.
- Massage therapists shall endeavor, through their practice of massage therapy, to improve the quality and scientific knowledge related to the practice of massage therapy.
- Massage therapists shall provide reasonable access and appropriate care while maintaining the effective distribution of resources for both patient and therapist.

Professional Misconduct

Professional misconduct is an act or omission that is in breach of the accepted ethical and professional standards of practice. This definition includes any demonstrated acts that would constitute a conflict of interest.

The following are acts of professional misconduct:

The Practice of the Profession and the Care of, and Relationship with, Patients

- Contravening a term, condition or limitation imposed on the massage therapist's certificate of registration or certificate of membership.
- Contravening a standard of practice of the profession or a published standard of the applicable provincial College, or failing to maintain a standard of practice of the profession.
- Doing anything to a patient in which consent is required by law, without such consent.
- Abusing a patient, verbally or physically.
- Practicing massage therapy while the massage therapist's ability to do so is impaired by any substance.
- Discontinuing professional services that are needed unless the patient requests the discontinuation, alternative services are arranged, the patient is given a reasonable opportunity to arrange alternative services or the patient is abusive and the massage therapist has made all reasonable attempts or arranged alternative services.
- Practicing massage therapy while the massage therapist is in a conflict of interest.
- Breaching an agreement with the patient relating to professional services for the patient or fees for such services.
- Failing to maintain the massage therapist's practice premises in a safe and sanitary manner.
- Failing to reveal the exact nature of a secret remedy or treatment used by the member following a request to do so by the patient, a patient's representative, or the appropriate College.
- Inappropriately using a term, title or designation in respect of the massage therapist's practice.
- Using a name other than the massage therapist's name as set out in the register in the course of providing or offering to provide services within the scope of practice of massage therapy.
- Failing to identify themselves by name or certificate number, on the request of the patient, the patient's representative or another health professional.

Records

- Failing to keep records as required.
- Falsifying a record relating to the massage therapist's practice.
- Failing to provide, without reasonable cause, a report or certificate relating to an examination or treatment performed by the massage therapist, within a reasonable time, to the patient, or the patient's representative after such a request.
- Signing or issuing, in the massage therapist's professional capacity, a document that the massage therapist knows contains a false or misleading statement.
- Allowing any person to examine a patient health record, or giving any information, copy or item from a patient health record to any person except as required or allowed by law.
- Failing to provide information from a patient health record for which the massage therapist has primary responsibility, as required by law.
- Failing to make arrangements with a patient for the transfer of the patient's records in the care of the massage therapist when the massage therapist retires from practice, changes office locations, and the patient requests that the records be transferred, or when otherwise requested by the patient.

Business Practices

- Submitting an account or charge for services that the massage therapist knows is false or misleading
- Charging or accepting a fee or amount that is excessive or unreasonable in relation to the services performed.
- Charging or accepting a fee or amount under any agreement, wherein the fee or amount is excessive or unreasonable having regard to the services to be performed or that may be performed pursuant to the agreement.
- Failing to advise, in advance of services being rendered, of the fees proposed to be charged for the services to be rendered.
- Failing to abide by a written undertaking or to carry out an agreement entered into by a massage therapist to the provincial association or superseding applicable regulatory body.
- Offering or giving a reduction for prompt payment of an account.
- Failing to itemize an account for professional services, if requested by the patient or the person or agency that is to pay, in whole or in part, for the services.
- Selling or assigning any debt owed to the massage therapist for professional services. This does not include the use of credit cards to pay for professional services.

Sexual Ethics

- Committing any form of sexual impropriety with the patient, including any behavior, gestures or expressions that are seductive or sexually demeaning to the patient, inappropriate disrobing or draping procedures and inappropriate comments about or to the patient.
- Committing any form of sexual abuse or sexual activity with the patient or engaging in any conduct with the patient that is sexual or may reasonably be interpreted as sexual.

Advertising and Promotion

- Offering to guarantee a cure, either verbally or in writing or by advertising or otherwise.
- Advertising, promotion, and other marketing activities that are not in good taste, inaccurate, and capable of misleading the public. Any conduct, either directly or indirectly or through any medium or agent that:
 - Misrepresents facts
 - Compares, whether directly, indirectly or by innuendo, the massage therapist's service or ability with that of any other practitioner or clinic, or promises or offers more effective service or better results than those available elsewhere
 - Deprecates another massage therapist or clinic as to service, ability or fees
 - Creates an unjustified expectation about the results the massage therapist can achieve
 - Is made under any false or misleading guise, takes advantage, either physical, emotional, or financial of any patient, or uses coercion, duress, or harassment

- Is undignified, in bad taste, or otherwise offensive so as to be incompatible with the best interests of the public or tends to harm the standing of the massage therapy profession generally
- Discloses the name of patients

General Matters of Misconduct

- Contravening a federal, provincial or territorial law, or a municipal by-law or rule if the purpose of the law, by-law or rule is to protect the public health or the contravention is relevant to the massage therapist's suitability to practice.
 - Engaging in conduct or performing an act, in the course of practicing massage therapy that, having regard to all the circumstances, would reasonably be regarded by massage therapists as disgraceful, dishonorable or unprofessional.
 - Treating or attempting to treat a condition beyond the massage therapist's competence.
 - Failing to refer a patient to a qualified medical practitioner where the massage therapist recognizes or ought to have recognized a condition which requires appropriate medical examination.
 - Engaging in conduct that would reasonably be regarded by massage therapists as conduct unbecoming a massage therapist.
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