

AMT Media Release

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AMT establishes a Biosecurity Planning Committee in response to COVID19.

State and Territory jurisdictions have moved to lift restrictions on the practice of remedial massage, leaving massage therapists around the country with the complex task of navigating how to recommence hands-on practice during COVID19 without clear industry practice guidelines in place.

The Association of Massage Therapists has established a Biosecurity Planning Committee to create a return-to-practice plan for massage therapists. Two of the key functions of the Committee are to develop infection control procedures that minimise the risk of transmission of COVID19 in the massage therapy context, and to develop procedures and policies that minimise the risks of harm to vulnerable communities arising from asymptomatic transmission of the virus.

AMT CEO Rebecca Barnett said "We advised members to shut down their practices on March 16, prior to the Government closures that took effect on March 25. Australia has been an international success story and we are delighted that the measures adopted by the National Cabinet have seen new COVID19 infections drop into single digits across the country. However, the concerns that motivated AMT's March 16 advice are still present, including the potential for pre and asymptomatic transmission of COVID19 to vulnerable communities in the massage therapy clinical environment."

"Massage therapists cannot socially or spatially distance in the course of a treatment so the industry has to account for some unique challenges in relation to COVID19. We are probably closest to the dental profession in terms of proximity to patients. While allied health overall has made very rapid transitions to telehealth and other strategies that encompass social distancing requirements, massage therapists have had to navigate the cognitive dissonance of being told it is lawful to practice during social distancing whilst being the closest sustained contact health intervention there is," said Ms Barnett.

Liz Sharkey provides compliance training and ongoing professional education for massage therapists through her company, Massage Training Australia. She says that massage therapists are crying out for appropriate industry-specific guidance on how to return to practice.

"I have been inundated with requests from massage therapists around Australia, asking for copies of the COVID19 guidelines that I have been compiling based on my own research. Therapists have been informed by their professional associations that it is now legal to operate but there is massive frustration and anger at the lack of guidance provided about how to do this safely during a pandemic. I have received hundreds of inquiries. Therapists want to feel confident that they have done everything in their power to mitigate the risks that COVID19 poses before they reopen their doors but they don't have industry-specific tools or a roadmap to navigate the myriad uncertainties and unknowns," Ms Sharkey said.

"I don't think the government has a comprehensive understanding of the various clinical contexts in which massage therapists operate. Many of the therapists who are contacting me are confused about how the lifting of restrictions applies to their specific circumstance – whether home-based practices are OK; whether in-home mobile visits are allowable; whether they have the right qualification to practice or even what kind of massage is OK. The public orders do not make this clear. It's a bit of a mess," Ms Sharkey added.

AMT's Biosecurity Planning Committee commences work on a return-to-practice roadmap this week. AMT continues to advise members to delay returning to practice until sentinel testing has determined the extent of undetected community infection and the biosecurity plan is finalised.



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