



Canadian Massage
Therapist Alliance

Alliance Canadienne
de Massothérapeutes



THE PROFESSION OF MASSAGE THERAPY IN CANADA

AN ENVIRONMENTAL SCAN

RESULTS AND ANALYSIS REPORT



Table of Contents

Executive Summary	3
Introduction	4
Methodology	4
Findings	4
Interview Highlights	5
<i>Regulation</i>	5
<i>Protected Titles</i>	5
<i>Evidence</i>	5
<i>Educational Standards</i>	5
<i>Insurance Companies</i>	5
<i>Roles of Professional Associations and Regulators</i>	5
<i>External Massage Therapy Definitions</i>	6
<i>National Advocacy</i>	6
<i>Perception of the Profession</i>	6
<i>Taxation of Massage Therapy Services</i>	6
Survey Highlights	6
<i>Massage Therapy Education</i>	6
<i>Massage Therapy Practice</i>	7
<i>Massage Therapy Profession</i>	7
Analysis	8
<i>Regulation</i>	8
<i>Educational Standards and Accreditation</i>	8
<i>Research</i>	9
<i>Insurance</i>	9
<i>Professional Identity</i>	9
<i>Professional Advocacy</i>	9
<i>Public Safety and Perception</i>	9
Next Steps	10



The Profession of Massage Therapy in Canada: An Environmental Scan

Results and Analysis Report

Executive Summary

In 2016, the Canadian Massage Therapist Alliance (CMTA), in the role of a nationwide alliance of Canadian massage therapy associations contracted Monkeytree Creative to conduct an environmental scan of massage therapy in Canada. This environmental scan included a literature review, an online survey, and telephone interviews. This environmental scan was critical in developing a clear picture of the massage therapy profession across Canada, and will be used by the CMTA to develop a strong and unified national strategy and national voice.

The survey received 2981 responses from across Canada, and 14 interviews were conducted. A variety of key themes emerged in the results of the environmental scan. The core issue identified consistently across the survey, interviews and literature review was the lack of a cohesive national identity and voice for the massage therapy profession. Many of the high-level issues that face the profession, including regulation, education, insurance, public perception, all came back to the lack of consistent messaging and advocacy coming from a unified, top-level platform.

This environmental scan allowed for the development of a clear picture of the “average” massage therapist in Canada, including information about where they work, how they work, how they’re paid, and how they were educated. It also provides insight into massage therapists’ perspectives of competency, scope of practice, self-regulation and the role of massage therapy compared to other health professions. The themes identified in this scan were quite consistent across Canada, which helped to create a solid general overview of perspectives, and develop specific recommendations.

This scan took into account the diversity of massage therapy in Canada, and identified high-level factors that affect both individual massage therapists across the country and the profession as a whole. The CMTA continues to work on developing a clear national voice, tackling the various, inter-related high-level issues that may make it difficult to achieve.



Introduction

The Canadian Massage Therapist Alliance (CMTA) is a nationwide alliance composed of provincial massage therapy associations. The CMTA works to promote massage therapy as a component of the Canadian healthcare system.

An environmental scan was performed by Monkeytree Creative to provide an objective review of the current and anticipated factors that will impact the CMTA and the profession of massage therapy. The environmental scan included a literature review, an online survey and telephone interviews.

The results from the environmental scan will be used to help the CMTA and its provincial association members better envision and plan for future success.

Methodology

The primary approaches for the environmental scan included both a passive and active approach. The passive approach involved an opportunistic data collection process from established and credible pre-existing literature and research. The key terms, definitions, terminology, studies, models, case studies, academic papers, web resources and social media knowledge gained from this literature review formed the theoretical structure for the analysis of the subsequent survey and interviews.

The active approach involved analyzing reactions to obtain rigorous and objective new data without preconceived perceptions around the answers to questions. The active approach is meant to challenge the status quo and to provide new and different ideas to accompany the findings from the more passive sources. This environmental scan included a survey of massage therapists in Canada and telephone interviews.

A survey of association members across all jurisdictions was conducted with 2981 respondents. The survey included basic information and demographic data that allows for a general impression of an average massage therapist in Canada, including where they work, how they work, what they are paid and how they are being educated. The second portion of the survey focused on massage therapists' perspectives on the massage therapy profession relative to other healthcare professions, as well as overall impressions massage therapists have around competency, scope of practice and self-regulation. In addition to the survey, fourteen telephone interviews and one in-writing interview were also conducted to provide a larger picture perspective and inform overall themes.

Findings

The results from the telephone interviews provided broad themes about massage therapy in Canada, and the survey results provided further information about massage therapists in Canada.



Interview Highlights

The overarching themes identified by the interviews related to the lack of national regulation for massage therapy, a lack of national standards and competencies, the lack of evidence for clinical benefits of massage therapy, the reliance on the insurance industry and extended benefits income, and a lack of a coordinated vision of the profession by massage therapists, provincial associations and the national alliance.

Regulation

Regulation, and specifically the lack of national regulation, was identified as a key issue. The issues related to regulation include a lack of understanding of self-regulation, a lack of concern amongst some jurisdictional members about regulation, and changing political landscapes across Canada with differing priorities which can affect regulation.

Protected Titles

Respondents from some provinces identified that the absence of a protected title for massage therapists within their province makes it more difficult for massage therapists to effectively integrate into health care teams, recognizing that in regulated provinces, non-registrants are prohibited from using certain protected titles.

Evidence

Many cited a lack of evidence around the clinical benefits of massage therapy, although others indicated that the evidence exists, particularly around the clinical benefits of massage therapy in hard reduction and mental health, but the evidence is not disseminated or communicated in a way that is consistent, which can make the evidence itself appear inconsistent.

Educational Standards

A lack of national educational standards, national competencies and the slow path towards accreditation can lead to a weak research base. Further, this lack of educational standards also means differing abilities amongst graduates who then enter the workforce at varying stages of knowledge and education. This in turn dilutes the profession and can pit better educated massage therapists against those with less rigorous educational levels. Key stakeholders by and large identify the need for a Baccalaureate degree in massage therapy.

Insurance Companies

There is a strong agreement that the massage therapy profession must work cooperatively with the insurance industry to ensure integration, collaboration and communication. This mutually beneficial relationship can only be effective when the role of massage therapists as health professionals is clearly defined.

Roles of Professional Associations and Regulators

In some regulated jurisdictions, there is a perception of blurred lined between the regulator and professional association. While not an uncommon occurrence, this can be confusing for massage therapists and can create difficulties for the two bodies. There is a need for role clarity and understandable definitions for the roles of the regulator and the professional association.



External Massage Therapy Definitions

There is a consistent theme and concern that massage therapy is too easily defined by others. Insurance companies define the scope, and other providers in turn define where and how massage therapists are utilized.

National Advocacy

A key issue identified is the lack of a national voice. There is a perception that the provincial associations are too focused on provincial issues and do not integrate as a whole. A lack of national voice and coordinated vision for massage therapy in terms of strategic planning, lobbying, advocacy and media strategy have been identified as critical issues that need to be rectified in order to advance the profession.

Perception of the Profession

Some respondents have identified a conflict in the profession in terms of the way in which the profession is viewed, both by the public and internally. This causes conflict in terms of how to advance the profession. In some jurisdictions there is a perception that massage therapy can be viewed either as health care or as a relaxation service, while in others, there is a belief that not focusing on the profession from a health care perspective sets the profession back in ways in which it could be difficult to surmount.

Taxation of Massage Therapy Services

While HST/GST exemption were noted as an important issue, it did not tend to surface as the highest level issue during the interviews conducted. Individual massage therapists see this as a barrier, but this was not identified as a top priority professional issue.

Survey Highlights

The survey was disseminated in all Canadian jurisdictions by the provincial and territorial massage therapy associations from September 19, 2016 to December 5, 2016. The membership survey received 2,919 responses in English and 62 responses in French for a total of 2,981 responses. Unsurprisingly based on population, the majority of the respondents were from Ontario (48%), Manitoba (16%), British Columbia (9%) and Saskatchewan (7%). It is however important to note that New Brunswick and Nova Scotia proportionally received a strong number of respondents, with over 150 each. The majority of respondents work in provinces in which massage therapy is regulated.

Massage Therapy Education

78% of respondents attended a private educational institution for their massage therapy training with the majority, but still under 50%, completing an hours based program in the 1501-2200 hours range. 70% graduated when under the age of 35, and almost 80% received a diploma when they graduated. 27% completed no other degree, and 25% have completed undergraduate degrees (largely in kinesiology or biology and, to a lesser degree, business administration).



Massage Therapy Practice

Over 60% work full time in massage therapy, with full time being defined as over 25 hours a week, with dominant work settings of group professional practices or clinics with other types of healthcare practitioners or with other massage therapists only. Over 93% refer to themselves as “Registered Massage Therapist”.

Over 60% spend the bulk of their time working in direct client care. When treating clients, the majority of the time is spent on hands-on care, with assessment, evaluation and interpretation at less than 10% of the time. While respondents indicated they did spend their ‘non-direct client care’ time reading journals, attending conferences or doing research, the vast majority, over 70%, indicated this as minimal job time with a range of 1-5 hours per month. The average number of hours worked is roughly 2000 per year.

Over 20% earn an income of less than \$25,000, 23% earn an income in the range of \$25,000-39,999, and 18% earn an income in the range of 40,000-54,999. The average cost for a 60 minute session is \$71.00-90.00, and over 60% of respondents set their own fee schedule. 60% feel they are adequately paid and are earning what they expected to earn.

Massage Therapy Profession

Respondents strongly agree that they practice in scope, understand the role of a regulatory college, practice to an appropriate level of competence, document in a timely fashion, encourage clients to ask questions, are ethical in how they resolve issues, show professional respect and meet their professional standards and protect privacy.

Approximately half of the respondents were not familiar with the Interjurisdictional Competencies Document. Respondents feel that the differing educational standards, lack of consistent regulation, the need for evidence-based resources, differing practice environments, and the consideration of a Baccalaureate degree are all important issues to themselves and the profession.

Just over 50% feel the public understand the role of massage therapy while 93% of respondents feel strongly that public perception of massage therapists is very important to the profession as a whole. They also feel that HST/GST is an important professional issue, although only 64% agree that the HST/GST serves as a barrier to patients seeking massage therapy.

In terms of other healthcare professions, the majority of respondents feel that chiropractors, physiotherapists, occupational therapists and athletic therapists understand the role of massage therapy. Physicians and nurses rank as least understanding. Over 60% feel massage therapists are more positively regarded in the last 10 years by other healthcare professions as well as insurance benefit providers.



Analysis

The analysis of the interviews and survey responses were informed by the literature review. The key issues for the profession of massage therapy are regulation, education, research, insurance, professional identity, advocacy and public safety and perception.

Regulation

The provinces in which massage therapy is regulated (ON, BC, NB, NL) are governed by regulatory authorities (Colleges). Professional interests in these provinces are championed by the associations that serve as the professional advocacy body, while the colleges serve their mandate to protect the public. In the other (unregulated) provinces, there are professional associations that all report a strong desire to regulate the profession in the public interest. Each of these provinces have worked, in some cases for many years, to achieve regulation for massage therapy in their province. Much of the focus of these unregulated provinces is on the pursuit of regulation, which can lead to a lack of national cohesion. The public perception, as well as the perceptions of other healthcare providers, is also affected by this uneven regulatory environment.

Within the broader issue of regulation, is the issue of use of protected title and the concept self-regulation. Over 90% of the survey respondents refer to themselves as Registered Massage Therapist. Although a disproportionate number of respondents are from Ontario, due to its population size, and Ontario is a regulated province with a protected title in use, some unregulated massage therapists also refer to themselves as registered. This protected title that comes with regulation serves as a signal to the public and other providers that there is a level of competency and safety achieved by the profession. This inconsistent use of protected titles in unregulated provinces is detrimental to the profession. Many believe that their ability to uphold professional standards is enough to be considered self-regulated, but it is not the same as self-regulation of the profession. There is confusion among massage therapists about what regulation, and self-regulation, means.

Educational Standards and Accreditation

The massage therapy educational standards and institutions vary greatly across Canada. An independent accreditation body, the Canadian Massage Therapy Council for Accreditation (CMTCA), was created by the National Accreditation Planning Committee which was struck by the Federation of Massage Therapy Regulatory Authorities of Canada (FOMTRAC). The goal of the CMTCA was to establish national accreditation standards and develop a plan to implement national accreditation for massage therapy programs in Canada. By elevating education levels for massage therapists and ensuring that institutions providing massage therapy could effectively set standards, nationally established high-level baseline education for massage therapy could be ensured. National accreditation would also allow for greater provincial mobility for massage therapists, and would help to improve the perception of massage therapy as a legitimate healthcare profession.

It is also important to note that 100% of those interviewed believe that massage therapy would benefit greatly from a Baccalaureate degree, and the majority of massage therapists, according to the survey, believe that moving towards a Baccalaureate degree would be beneficial.



Research

There is a strong body of evidence that support massage therapy in health promotion, disease prevention, rehabilitation, and the treatment of specific conditions including mental health and drug addictions, chronic pain management, sleep restoration and as a therapy for those suffering from post-traumatic stress disorder and in palliative care. While there is a large scope of academic literature that supports the clinical use of massage therapy in a variety of areas, a lack of evidence-based practice continues to be an issue. Massage therapists and professional associations agree on the importance of a strong research base for massage therapy practice, but there is a lack of implementation of evidence-informed practice to support the role and necessity of massage therapy in healthcare.

Insurance

Reports from the insurance industry indicate that massage therapy is the most frequently used paramedical benefit. Insurance companies ascertained that billions of dollars were being spent on massage therapy services, which prompted the companies to greater restrict the requirements of practitioners, including requiring that a massage therapist had completed a 2200 hour education program in order to qualify and only for services that are deemed 'medically-necessary'. Some argue that the insurance industry is defining the scope of massage therapy practice in Canada in a way that the profession has yet to do, and forcing a move away from 'relaxation' use into a more healthcare oriented structure. They are also seen by some as quasi-regulators that are setting the standard for massage therapy requirements based on their own rules of payment.

Professional Identity

There is a lack of clear and cohesive professional identity. Descriptions of the profession are often described passively, such as 'we do more than just help people relax.' There is great passion for the profession, but no clear articulation of what massage therapy is, despite national definitions. Defining an entire profession of health care providers without a strong healthcare lens is a symptom of broader professional insecurity that weakens the profession as a whole.. A strong professional identity not only bolsters members of the profession, it creates greater clarity for those who look to massage therapy as an adjunct healthcare service.

Professional Advocacy

There is a perceived lack of a strong, united and cohesive 'voice' on a national level. There is the perception that massage therapy is laboring under a lack of cohesive identity in part because of a lack of consistency in regulation and educational levels, but also because the 'voice' of the profession is not clear. For example, there is a lack of a national media strategy and a lack of a strong message about the identity of the massage therapy profession. The profession is allowing the emphasis to be on outside factors, which are harder to control, rather than being proactive and taking the lead in establishing their own clear professional 'voice' and identity.

Public Safety and Perception

There has been a positive change in the perception and mind-set about massage therapy amongst the public, with many people recognizing the benefits of massage therapy. However, there are members of the public who perceive massage therapy to be either sexual activity, a pure 'relaxation' technique with no therapeutic value, or an unnecessary service performed by people who are not highly trained in



musculoskeletal manipulation. This can be exacerbated by the negative stories that appear occasionally about the massage therapists who have violated public safety and trust by engaging in unsavoury activities with patients/clients. Professional associations in each province have a strong role to play in speaking to the problems that have occurred and in working to ensure that the perception of massage therapy in their province is not influenced by the occasional negative stories.

Next Steps

This environmental scan was a critical step in outlining the current state of the profession of massage therapy across Canada. This information will also be strongly considered when creating a national strategy for the advancement of profession of massage therapy in Canada. The CMTA will continue to keep association members apprised of any additional information or developments as they become available. Thank you to all of those who participated in the online survey and the telephone interviews. We look forward to working together to create a strong and unified professional voice.

This report was prepared by the Canadian Massage Therapist Alliance based on the report provided by Monkeytree Creative.