



ALBERTA
HEALTH AND WELLNESS

Office of the Minister

AR67812

Ms. Chandra Kastern
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Massage Therapist Association of Alberta
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Ms. Roxanne Smith
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Remedial Massage Therapists Association
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Ms. Colleen MacDougall
Executive Director and Registrar
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Dear Ms. Kastern, Ms. Smith, and Ms. MacDougall:

As you are aware, the Health Professions Advisory Board (the Board) met during October 2008 to consider whether the profession of massage therapy should be regulated under the *Health Professions Act* and if so, to recommend a regulatory model and the composition of the regulatory body.

In December 2008, it was brought to the Board's attention that the Alberta Registered Massage Therapists Society (ARMTS) dissolved as an association effective December 31, 2008. Accordingly, the Board felt it necessary to review its October recommendations bearing in mind the ARMTS dissolution.

I have now been advised by Mrs. Margaret Johnson, Chair, Health Professions Advisory Board, of the Board's recommendations. Having carefully considered the recommendations, I am prepared to recommend to Cabinet that the *Health Professions Act* be amended to include massage therapists as a regulated profession. Specifically, I am recommending that therapeutic massage therapists become regulated, but I will not recommend regulating other classifications of massage practitioners, such as, relaxation massage practitioners or practitioners performing culturally specific massage techniques such as "Shiatsu" massage. I am further prepared to recommend the following:

1. That the Massage Therapist Association of Alberta, the Remedial Massage Therapist Association and the Natural Health Practitioners of Canada Association, each appoint two persons to a transitional steering committee to develop a schedule under the *Health Professions Act*, regulation policies, and bylaws;

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2. That the transitional steering committee take all necessary steps towards incorporating as a single association under the *Society's Act*, and develop a council and regulatory body structure so that it can transition to a college under the Act;
3. That there be one category of massage therapist namely, registered massage therapist;
4. That the massage therapy college be responsible for developing entry level competencies based on a national competency model; entry level competencies will be basic competencies rather than advanced competencies;
5. The model should be based on the proposed 2009 national competency model (or its successor) plus provincial standards if developed and all approved education programs be a minimum of 2,200 hours and include significant clinical content;
6. That the college must develop a transition plan in regulation to address registration of all current practitioners wishing to practice therapeutic massage who do not meet the educational entry to practice requirements, and
7. The transition plan is to include assessment of substantial equivalencies, restricted practice licensure, and establishing an effective date whereby all new graduates from approved programs will need to meet the requirements of the Act.

In reaching my decision, I accept the findings of the Board's review of the factors set out in section 25(4) of the *Health Professions Act*. In particular, I accept the Board's findings that therapeutic massage carries a risk of harm, both physical and psychological due to a number of factors such as insufficient competencies, lack of educational standards and inadequate disciplinary enforcement abilities by massage therapy associations.

I acknowledge that regulation is a concern for some massage practitioners who may not meet the educational entry to practice standards required under the *Health Professions Act*. These concerns include inability to practice massage, loss of livelihood, inability to upgrade education to required levels, and an inability to submit treatment claims to insurance plans for reimbursement. I accept the Board's recommendations that these concerns must be addressed in regulation by allowing these practitioners to register with the college through establishing substantial equivalency provisions in regulation and allowing currently practicing massage practitioners to practice massage therapy with appropriate restrictions on their practice. In addition, these practitioners can continue to provide relaxation massage which will not be regulated under the *Health Professions Act*.

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I am not prepared to recommend a multi-category entry to practice model to Cabinet.


Based on information provided by the Board, I am not convinced that a multi-category model of regulating massage therapy would better serve Albertans than would the single-category model. I accept that a massage therapist should have the competencies to perform the full scope of practice rather than a segment of the scope of practice as would be the case under a multi-category model. Further, I cannot ignore that the single-category model is used in the three regulated provinces of British Columbia, Ontario and Newfoundland and is being considered by the majority of the other provinces in Canada. Provincial and territorial governments across Canada today must develop policies in the spirit of cooperation and shared vision.

I am pleased to be advised by the Board that the three associations in favour of regulation have agreed to work together towards regulation, notwithstanding divergent views on issues such as single versus multi-category models of practice. I trust that you will be able to set aside your long held differences and join together towards achieving regulation of massage therapy under the *Health Professions Act*.

I now encourage you to begin working with the other Alberta massage therapy associations to begin the process of regulating massage therapists. During this process, Ms. Karel Bennett, Director, Health Professions at 780-415-0231 will provide you with the direction and government support which you will need as you work towards regulating under the *Health Professions Act*.

Thank you for your dedication and commitment to Alberta's massage therapy profession.

Sincerely,



Ron Liepert
Minister of Health and Wellness

cc: Dr. John Neumann
Alberta Association of Therapeutic Masseurs