

AMT Media Release

15 January 2015

AMT launches petition to retain the private health insurance rebate for massage therapy

The Association of Massage Therapists (AMT) is calling on the Federal Health Minister and Department of Health to retain the private health insurance rebate for massage therapy.

AMT has launched an online petition in response to concerns that a recent draft review of natural therapies by the National Health and Medical Research Council (NHMRC) may prompt the Australian Government to remove health insurance rebates from ancillary policies that cover massage therapy.

AMT Secretary, Rebecca Barnett, is concerned about how the draft findings may be applied in policy-making.

"The NHMRC's brief was to look for systematic reviews over a five-year period, which is a relatively narrow scope for the study. The findings clearly underscore the urgent need for further research but we need to keep a clear head about the distinction between unproven therapy and ineffective therapy," Ms Barnett said.

The draft review also highlights some of the confounding factors involved in trying to test patient-centred therapies like massage under clinically controlled conditions.

"Even the best-designed clinical trials of massage therapy don't rate well under the standard methodological scales used in systematic reviews. It's impossible to blind patients or practitioners to the therapy. Also, the labour-intensive nature of massage doesn't lend itself to large-scale studies with thousands of patients. Most controlled trials of massage therapy involve less than 30 subjects and are therefore considered to be statistically underpowered by reviewers," said Ms Barnett.

"Emerging disciplines such as psychoneuroimmunology are examining the mechanisms via which massage therapy may impact human health. Fascia research is also uncovering how specific types of manual therapy impact mechanoreceptors in precise ways."

AMT is also petitioning the Federal Government to fund more research into the efficacy of massage therapy as a safe and cost effective alternative to drug and surgical interventions.

AMT president, Annette Cassar said massage therapy plays an important role in the broader healthcare system.

"Massage therapists are uniquely placed to provide highly individualised, patient-centred care, filling a care gap in a way that busy medical practitioners often can't due to time constraints," Ms Cassar said.

"We are concerned that limiting or compromising patient access to massage therapy based on the relatively narrow scope of the NHMRC review could place even greater strain on an already overstretched primary healthcare system."

The petition can be accessed at <http://bit.ly/amtpetition>

Media enquiries:

Rebecca Barnett 02 9211 2441, 0414 732 873

Kat Boehringer 0401 218 078

