

AMT Media Release

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The Association of Massage Therapists warns of dire consequences if rebate for massage therapy axed

The Association of Massage Therapists (AMT) is warning that a move from the Federal Health Minister to axe the private health insurance rebate for massage therapy could have devastating consequences on the industry and healthcare at large.

The National Health and Medical Research Council (NHMRC) in collaboration with the Department of Health has been conducting an ongoing review of 17 natural therapies including massage therapy to assess their clinical efficacy. In January, a leaked draft of the review reported in the media indicates that all are set to fail the test.

While massage was among a small group of therapies considered to have the best evidence, the evidence was deemed of low to moderate quality, and it will still fail to meet the stringent requirements.

AMT Secretary Rebecca Barnett said a move to axe the private health insurance rebate for massage therapy could hit small business owners and less established practitioners hard.

"The majority of our members operate small businesses. Axing the rebate will not only impose a greater financial burden on clients but also threaten the viability of many therapists' businesses," Ms Barnett said.

In January, AMT launched an online petition in response to concerns. To date, the petition has received an overwhelming response from more than 7000 massage therapy practitioners and clients concerned about the consequences of such a move.

"The comments from clients show how much they value their massage treatments and the insurance rebate. They tell a powerful story of people being supported in the management of an array of health issues, such as arthritis, headache, anxiety and depression, and various chronic and acute pain conditions," Ms Barnett said.

"Given that the global burden of chronic diseases is predicted to skyrocket, developing and strengthening collaboration between conventional and natural therapy health sectors is imperative. Massage therapists not only help to fill that care gap but can also provide a vital referral link to primary care practitioners."

Ms Barnett said that removing the natural therapies rebate from private health insurance would also negatively impact private health insurers.

"Consumers have told us that they will dump their private health insurance if insurers no longer cover massage therapy. Given that new data from industry group Private Healthcare Australia shows 1,576,409 policies have been dumped and 985,281 downgraded over the past three years, we think the Department of Health should be concerned."

Based on current plans, any policy containing a modality that is classed as 'unproven' is set to have its 10-39 per cent rebate removed on April 1 this year.

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

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