

AMT statement

November/December 2020 training package consultation

Ongoing review of the massage therapy industry's nationally recognised qualifications is crucial to ensuring that our education standards remain current, evidence-informed and responsive to the health and wellbeing needs of Australians.

The current training package consultation encompasses draft units of competence for the Certificate IV in Massage Therapy and the Diploma of Remedial Massage. These draft units are available to download from the [SkillsIQ training package consultation page](#).

The consultation period on the new draft units closes at 5pm on December 24.

SkillsIQ is also currently gathering feedback in connection with the proposed Advanced Diploma of Remedial Massage. You will find this survey [here](#).

AMT warmly encourages members to get involved in this current training package consultation and Advanced Diploma survey.

Training packages can be confusing to read so we have summarised AMT's key positions in the hope that it will help you to navigate the qualification structure and draft units.

- AMT welcomes the development of the new unit, HLTMSG018 Understand the principles of pain neuroscience, as a core unit in the Diploma and an elective in the Certificate IV. Including this in the industry's national qualifications will provide massage therapists with the skills to meaningfully support the [National Strategic Action Plan for Pain Management](#).
- AMT also welcomes the development of the new unit, HLTMSG017 Apply relaxation massage clinical practice, which frames relaxation massage as an evidence-informed clinical treatment. This will support massage therapists responding to the growing mental health burden in Australia, and reflect the efficacy of affective massage therapy in ameliorating the symptoms of anxiety and depression across multiple populations and comorbidities.
- AMT is excited to see the unit, CHCPOL003 Research and apply evidence to practice, included in the core of the Diploma and as an elective in the Certificate IV. This will enable massage therapists to adapt and renew their knowledge in response to emerging research and evidence and, where appropriate, align their practice with government health priorities. It will also foster a culture of research literacy which will bolster the industry response to any future government reviews of the efficacy and effectiveness of massage therapy.



PO Box 826
Broadway NSW 2007

T: 02 9211 2441

F: 02 9211 2281

www.amt.org.au

info@amt.org.au

ABN 32 001 859 285

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- AMT strongly supports the initiative to move HLTAID0011 to an elective in the Diploma rather than within the core of the qualification. This has positive implications for candidates who have disabilities that might prevent them from obtaining first aid certification and therefore exclude them from the Diploma of Remedial Massage. Ongoing renewal of first aid certification is an industry requirement so therapists will continue to undertake first aid certification at all stages of their career regardless of whether it is in the core of the qualification or an elective.
- AMT is concerned by the assessment condition in HLTMSG017, Apply relaxation massage clinical practice, that requires students to perform at least 60 direct client consultations within the 80 hours of direct client consultation work. In AMT's view this is unreasonably burdensome and leaves little scope for students to engage in case-study based work, reflection and other activities related to client consultation. AMT proposes that the number of client consultations be reduced to 40 as a component of the 80 hours of client consultation.
- AMT is concerned that the two core units in the Diploma, HLTMSG016 and HLTMSG017 (Apply Remedial Massage and Apply Relaxation Massage) appear to require students to complete at least 280 of direct client consultation work. This is unreasonably burdensome, resulting in a qualification with a disproportionately heavy emphasis on skills assessment at the expense of skills development. AMT can see no clear educational outcome arising from this number of supervised clinical hours.
- AMT does not support the performance evidence requirement in HLTMSG016 for students to monitor and evaluate treatments provided to three different clients for at least three treatments per client. This is impracticable in the context of an RTO supervised student clinic where guaranteeing attendance of particular clients over repeated sessions when a particular student is rostered at clinic is extremely challenging.
- AMT is concerned by the apparent dilution of the content in the Certificate IV in key competencies such as WHS, infection control, and legal and ethical compliance. AMT is particularly concerned that there appears to be an underpinning assumption that Certificate IV qualified therapists do not work in independent practice and we question the rationale behind this assumption.

The Certificate IV is the foundation of massage therapy practice and the entry level qualification to practice in Australia. In the context of the COVID-19 pandemic, downgrading these key competencies from the 'manage' level (in line with the proposed Diploma qualification structure) to 'comply with' or 'participate in' will result in a workforce that is not equipped to respond safely and proportionately within the domain of public health.



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Due consideration also needs to be given to job outcomes that arise from candidates undertaking a Certificate IV in massage therapy along with, for example, a Certificate IV in Aged Care or a Certificate IV in Fitness. Facilitating pathways to achievement of dual qualifications that support jobs in a range of healthcare and wellbeing settings beyond MSK private practice is a key workforce development strategy, and in line with the burgeoning body of evidence for the efficacy of massage therapy in aged care settings. It also gives RTOs more scope to offer particular pathways of study, facilitating greater choice for both the RTO and the student.

AMT recommends that the Certificate IV includes these competencies at a manage level rather than at the proposed level:

- CHCLEG003 Manage legal and ethical compliance
- HLTINF004 Manage the prevention and control of infection
- HLTWHS004 Manage work health and safety

This will not only facilitate the achievement of dual qualifications but also provide a clear pathway between the Certificate IV into the Diploma of Remedial Massage.

- AMT is concerned that the assessor requirements across all units of competence in the Certificate IV and Diploma (for assessors to hold current practising membership of a relevant Australian professional body that represents remedial massage therapists, myotherapists, or soft tissue therapists) may needlessly constrain otherwise appropriately qualified assessors from training and assessing students enrolled in these qualifications.
- AMT is concerned that the performance evidence across many of the units is needlessly prescriptive and places an unreasonable assessment burden on both RTOs and students (for example, long lists of muscles, joints and presenting conditions which must be assessed). It is difficult to see the logic that underpins the inclusions and exclusions in these lists.
- AMT notes that CHCPRP003 Reflect on and improve own professional practice is no longer a core competency. We further note that reflection is instead now embedded in HLTMSG014 Adapt massage treatments to meet specific needs; HLTMSG015 Adapt massage practice for athletes; HLTMSG016 Apply remedial massage clinical practice; and HLTMSG017 Apply relaxation massage clinical practice. Consistent with this approach to embedding reflection within these competencies, AMT would like to see reflection embedded in HLTMSG009 Develop massage practice, given that reflection is a cornerstone of health professional practice and development.



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Advanced Diploma Survey

AMT's response to the Advanced Diploma survey will reflect our overarching position that the qualification needs to have clear job outcomes that align with government health priorities and burden of disease in Australians.

The advanced diploma should provide an opportunity for qualified therapists to explore career pathways and develop skillsets in specialised areas of practice that will increasingly be in demand, such as pain management, aged care, chronic disease, rural, regional and remote health, palliative care and mental health.

The COVID-19 pandemic has highlighted the need for the massage therapy industry to future-proof itself by broadening therapists' capacity to understand, engage with, and support public health. With this in mind, there is potential for the Advanced Diploma to include a public health competency, which would prepare massage therapists to fill temporary roles in the event of the need for a surge capacity workforce like we witnessed with COVID-19. This would enable therapists to continue working in the domain of health during periods where the risks of providing massage therapy may be unacceptably high.

AMT would not support or endorse an Advanced Diploma that was essentially just a grab bag of further techniques such as dry needling and IASTM. Not only are these already well catered for in weekend workshop format, but they are also subject to the vagaries of fashion. Clinical reasoning on how and when to use various techniques and approaches, including the capacity to critically assess techniques, should provide the frame in which the Advanced Diploma is developed.



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