

# AMT Position Statement

## Volunteer massage

**A strong volunteer culture within an industry is a positive expression of altruism and community-mindedness. Pro bono (for the public good) work is central to the ethos of some professions, most notably the legal profession, which has structured pro bono schemes.<sup>1</sup>**

As a caring profession, the massage therapy industry has a long history of practitioners volunteering their services to support communities, sporting clubs, charity events and specific patient groups. However, the practise of qualified practitioners providing free massage is contentious and potentially exploitative, particularly in the context of services provided to well-resourced and wealthy organisations that can afford to pay for them.

In the case of 'voluntourism', offering free services can perpetuate outdated institutions and cause very real harm in the guise of compassion and charity.

The provision of volunteer massage must also be viewed in the context of broader workforce development challenges. The massage therapy profession remains predominantly part time and low paid. The median hourly wage of massage therapists is \$32, which is \$9 below the all jobs median of \$41 per hour.<sup>2</sup> Only 25% of people employed as massage therapists work full time hours, which is 41 percentage points below the all jobs average of 66%.<sup>3</sup> Put simply, massage therapists generally do not have the same resources and structural advantages to provide pro bono services as solicitors working within the legal profession, where the median wage is \$41 per hour and full time employment is the norm.

Additionally, volunteering massage services carries the same compliance burden as paid work, such as collecting and storing health records; complying with workplace health and safety obligations, and adhering to statutory and professional codes of conduct, all of which incur a financial burden on the therapist providing the treatment.

AMT supports the provision of volunteer or free massage when disadvantaged or vulnerable people meaningfully benefit. The therapist providing the free service must be satisfied that there are not more valuable or appropriate ways that their resources or time can be donated.

AMT does not support the provision of volunteer or free massage when:

- a paid opportunity for a qualified therapist is compromised or adversely impacted. For example, volunteering for a sporting club that would otherwise be employing a qualified therapist.
- the business or livelihood of a qualified practitioner is undercut. For example, a clinic runs a special business promotion and expects practitioners to donate their time.



1 <https://www.probonocentre.org.au/information-on-pro-bono/history-of-pro-bono/>, accessed 7 December 2022.

2 ABS, Survey of Employee Earnings and Hours, May 2021.

3 Full-time share and full-time hours: ABS, 2016 Census, customised report.

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- the recipient or entity benefitting from the service is well resourced and can afford to pay. For example, a professional sporting team that uses labour from student therapists rather than paying for fully qualified practitioners.
- a qualified therapist or student is being exploited for free labour in the guise of gaining experience. For example, a student is required to complete excessive amounts of supervised clinic, beyond the hours required within the national competency standards.

In addition, AMT does not support the provision of free massage when a practitioner is performing the service in place of undertaking meaningful professional development (PD). Although volunteer massage work is valued by the community and recipients, the nature of the work means there are limited opportunities for the development of new skills and knowledge that contribute to industry currency.