

7 April 2020

## Calling for Clarity – Essential Healthcare

**Provide equal access to trusted health practitioners to reduce medical and hospital burden.**

We call on the Queensland government to align itself with other jurisdictions in Australia and expand its definition of permitted healthcare providers to include myotherapy.

A sensible definition would be that originally proposed by the Queensland government – providers with a Medibank provider number.

We know that **healthcare providers help ease the pressure on our hospital system and overburdened medical practitioners**. This is particularly important at this crucial time.

In fact, on 26<sup>th</sup> March 2020, the Commonwealth Principal Medical Advisor advised a broad range of allied health professions “government encourages healthcare workers to continue working, to help ease the pressure on our hospital system.”<sup>1</sup>

However, **Queensland’s current approach** to “essential healthcare services” is the **most restrictive in Australia**. Queensland’s approach is **out-of-line** with the Commonwealth and other States and Territories.

**Queenslanders are suffering** – they **rely on their healthcare providers to help them ease the burden of chronic conditions and pain**. But with the country’s most strict prohibition on healthcare practice, **numerous healthcare providers have ceased practice**. Their patients now have no choice but to increase pressure on already overburdened hospitals and medical practitioners.

Just last week, Victoria reversed its position on allied health and expanded its list of permitted allied healthcare providers to myotherapy, therapeutic and remedial massage, and other allied health providers. We urge Queensland to follow suit.

### Background

On 24 March 2020, the Prime Minister announced the prohibition of all beauty and personal care service spas and massage parlours.

On 31 March 2020, the Queensland Chief Health Officer issued Closure Direction (No. 4), which provides relevantly:

<i>Beauty and personal care</i>	Health services provided by health practitioners registered under
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<sup>1</sup> “where you don’t need a face-to-face consultation, government encourages audiovisual consultations.”

services Spas and massage parlours	the Health Practitioner Regulation National Law, with social distancing observed to the extent possible.
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The responses of all Australian State and Territory governments are summarised at Attachment 1.

### **What are the Results of Queensland’s Closure Direction?**

Right now, around Australia, many healthcare providers want to play their role helping our country through the Covid-19 pandemic. Healthcare providers can help reduce demand on overburdened hospitals and medical services.

However, unclear directions are confusing healthcare providers. This is resulting in healthcare providers shutting their doors, rather than risk police fining their patients and practices.

Unfortunately, the Queensland Direction has only added to the confusion among healthcare providers:

- the specific reference to the Health Practitioner Regulation National Law has healthcare providers asking if ONLY professions listed in the Law are permitted to practice;
- a number of industry associations have advised practitioners not listed in the Law to cease practice in Queensland – because practitioners are not insured to practice against government advice;
- it creates a disadvantage for the health outcomes of Queenslanders, by severely restricting access to trusted healthcare providers;
- it is not aligned with national pain management initiatives;<sup>2</sup>
- creating an even more fragmented approach to healthcare across Australia, where people in one town can access appropriate healthcare treatments prohibited to people in their neighbouring town;
- a number of small and micro-businesses and their employees are without income;
- the Queensland small business operators and employees who are out of work due to your Direction struggle to access Covid assistance without a formal government announcement that specifically mentions their industry/ies;
- we are receiving distraught phone calls from members, who simply don’t understand why government advice is so confusing and why one day they can treat patients and the next day they cannot treat patients, when the rest of Australia can continue to practice; and
- patients with chronic healthcare issues who have built a relationship of trust and understanding with their preferred healthcare provider over long periods of time suddenly do not know where to turn for appropriate assistance during a national healthcare crisis - let us hope that this does not result in unnecessary hospitalisations.

### **About Myotherapy Association Australia**

The Myotherapy Association Australia (MA) is Australia’s only association dedicated solely to the needs of myotherapists and the myotherapy profession. MA is committed to the highest standards of corporate governance and furthering the interests of myotherapists through programs that support, promote,

<sup>2</sup> <https://www.greghunt.com.au/6-8-million-to-improve-understanding-of-pain/>

develop, and endorse the myotherapy profession and maintain the highest standards of practice for our members and their clients.

### **Why Health Practitioner Regulation is not the most Appropriate Definition of Permitted Healthcare Services**

The Health Practitioner Regulation National Law only registers a very small number of listed healthcare professions. It does not include many trusted and well-respected healthcare professions, such as: exercise physiologists, speech pathologists, myotherapists, audiologists, dieticians, orthoptists, orthotists, prosthetists, and remedial massage therapists.

### **What should be Permitted Healthcare Services?**

Around Australia, State and Territory governments have listed non-essential services. They all include “personal care massage”. Many jurisdictions have specifically permitted remedial massage and other allied healthcare services, such as myotherapy.

Another approach, which we understand was originally proposed by the Queensland government, would be to allow Medibank-registered healthcare providers to continue practicing. Essentially, healthcare providers who meet strict criteria can apply to the private health insurers (PHIs) for a provider number. This allows payment of PHI rebates for services performed by that individual provider in a particular location (a separate provider number is provided for each location). Most PHIs follow Medibank in determining who is eligible for a provider number. PHIs have robust fraud detection mechanisms, including de-registering, and referring for prosecution, fraudulent providers.

The **Queensland government’s approach** that relies on the Health Practitioner Regulation National Law to define permitted healthcare providers is unnecessarily onerous and puts you **out of step with the rest of Australia**. I have attached an updated table that compares all Australian jurisdictions’ treatment of myotherapy.

I urge you to either:

- adopt your original proposal to permit Medibank-registered (PHI-registered) healthcare providers to continue practicing; or
- clarify that myotherapists are permitted to continue practicing in Queensland.

I am keen to discuss with you further how myotherapy fits into Queensland's health and medical services, so that we can together work on a fit-for-purpose definition that helps achieve government's goals of reducing unnecessary hospitalisations, where healthcare providers, such as myotherapists, can help patients better manage their health.

Please do not hesitate to contact me on 0410 724 655 if you have any queries.

Sincerely,



**Anna Yerondais**

Chief Executive Officer

Myotherapy Association Australia

**Attachments:**

1. **Australian Government Interpretations of Non-Essential Healthcare**
2. **Calling for Myotherapy to be Reinstated in Queensland – [name withheld]**
3. **Calling for Myotherapy to be Reinstated in Queensland – [name withheld]**
4. **Calling for Myotherapy to be Reinstated in Queensland – [name withheld]**
5. **Calling for Myotherapy to be Reinstated in Queensland – [name withheld]**
6. **Calling for Myotherapy to be Reinstated in Queensland – [name withheld]**
7. **Calling for Myotherapy to be Reinstated in Queensland – [name withheld]**
8. **Calling for Myotherapy to be Reinstated in Queensland – [name withheld]**
9. **Calling for Myotherapy to be Reinstated in Queensland – [name withheld]**
10. **Calling for Myotherapy to be Reinstated in Queensland – [name withheld]**
11. **Letter of Support for Myotherapy to Continue – [name withheld]**