

# MASSAGE THERAPISTS

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# Massage Therapists



## Introduction

In Canada, massage therapists provide treatment and prevention for musculoskeletal disorders, physiological dysfunction, injuries and pain through patient-centred care. These primary health care practitioners provide assessments of soft tissue and joints and use hands-on-manipulation in an effort to alleviate and/or prevent physical dysfunction and pain in the body (Hollis & Jones, 2009; Oths & Hinojosa, 2004). Using different techniques on soft tissues of the body as well as knowledge of anatomy and physiology massage therapists can help an individual achieve optimal health and wellbeing.

Globally, an important tenet of massage therapy is the promotion of mind and body wellbeing applying practices from Eastern and Western medicine (Oths & Hinojosa, 2004). As such, massage therapy has been considered a form of complementary and alternative medicine (CAM), yet it has taken great strides in becoming a regulated health profession in Canada.

Furthermore, evidence is mounting in clinical literature on the use of massage therapy for improving health outcomes for illnesses and conditions. This includes randomized control trials that demonstrate a reduction in pain and symptomatology for conditions such as osteoarthritis, colic, and even neonatal jaundice (Perlman et al., 2006; Sheidaei et al., 2016; Castejon-Castejob M., 2019; Zhang et al., 2019).

Massage therapists can work collaboratively with other health care professionals and play an integral role in health care teams (Oths & Hinojosa, 2004; Walkley, 2004). They can be found working in areas beyond private practice such as hospitals, clinical, rehabilitation centres and spa facilities (Canadian Massage Therapist Alliance, n.d.; Government of Canada, 2012).

This chapter provides an overview of the massage therapy profession in Canada. It begins with a description of the evolution and history of the profession, details about the scope of practice, remuneration details as well as how it is practiced across the country. This chapter will also explore the educational path required to become a massage therapist in the country, issues within the profession as well as current demographic information about individuals working as massage therapists in Canada. We conclude by highlighting some of the contemporary issues facing the profession.

## History of Massage Therapy

The practice of massage therapy was commonplace in various ancient civilizations such as Egypt, Greece, India and Thailand. In ancient Eastern practices, massage therapy was less preoccupied with body manipulation focusing instead on balancing energies and internal systems. In the Western world, it was philosophers like Hippocrates and Galen who explored methods of body manipulation to treat various musculoskeletal conditions (Pettman, 2007; Walkley, 2004).

## Eastern Perspectives

In 500BC, massage therapy could be identified in the Eastern world as a form of traditional medicine. For example, Chinese medicine practitioners employed light or no touch techniques such as Tui-Na, or Acupressure while Hindu communities employed Ayurvedic practice techniques (Hollis & Jones, 2009).

From the second century BC, Chinese practitioners developed a practice called “Amma” which became the foundation for both manual and energetic healing practices. This healing approach eventually found the way over to Japan which began using elements of Amma to create the massage therapy we now call Shiatsu.

Similarly, India was also beginning to adopt techniques from Amma into Hindu practices. These practices evolved and progressed into a sacred practice called ayurveda. Ayurveda which translates to science of life is a health practice that is oriented in the promotion of life, well-being and rebirth (Rao, 2018).

## Western Perspectives

In the Western world, the spinal manipulation and “rubbing” techniques being practiced by Hippocrates were gaining momentum and other philosophers were adopting these into their own therapies. It was not until after the Enlightenment that massage therapy became a formalized treatment modality.

**Figure 1. Timeline of massage therapy regulation in Canada**



Sources: (Canadian Massage Therapist Alliance, n.d.; Farrell, Emily Cowall, 2004; Federation of Massage Therapy Regulatory Authorities of Canada, 2018; MTAM, n.d.; MTANS, n.d.; NWMATA, 2018; RMQ, n.d.; RMTBC, n.d.);

In the mid 1800s two physiologists from Sweden and the Netherlands began using massage in their practice but both for very different purposes. Henrik Ling from Sweden applied principles of massage therapy to practicing gymnasts, while the Netherlands' Johann Geroge Mezger used massage to treat Europe's elite including royalty. Both of these used styles that led to the more formalized, systematic practice of Swedish massage and use of the terms "effleurage, petrissage, tapotement, and friction" that are still used today (Pettman, 2007; Tarver et al., 2015). This standardization of practice became the foundation for the initiation of the Society of Trained Masseuses in Britain which established a training program for massage therapy to be used during World War I.

### History of Massage Therapy in Canada

In Canada, many references to the evolution of massage therapy come from its use during World War I. Many hospitals created temporary orthopedic centers to treat musculoskeletal injuries or conditions for injured soldiers (College of Massage Therapists of Ontario, n.d.; Oths & Hinojosa, 2004). What was known as "remedial massage" evolved into massage therapy which became regulated by what was titled the Ontario Board of Regents in 1919. British Columbia followed in 1946 and Newfoundland and Labrador in 2002. More recently, New Brunswick formally announced regulation of massage therapy in 2013 and in 2017 Prince Edward Island became the fifth province to regulate the profession. As of 2020, Saskatchewan is in a transitional process of becoming the sixth province to regulate massage therapy (Baskwill, 2020) Manitoba is also expected to achieve regulation by 2024.

### Regulation

Massage therapy is a regulated health profession in the provinces of Ontario, British Columbia, New Brunswick, Newfoundland and Labrador, and Prince Edward Island (Canadian Massage & Manual Osteopathic Therapists Association, n.d.). At time of publication, Nova Scotia has a Restricted Title for Massage Therapy with two other provinces, Saskatchewan and Manitoba very close to obtaining regulation status. There are established regulatory authorities (Colleges) which regulate the standards of practice and conduct of massage therapists in these provinces to protect the public interest. In the other provinces and territories in Canada, the profession of massage therapy is not regulated by the government.

### Regulatory Bodies

- College of Massage Therapists of British Columbia
- College of Massage Therapists of Ontario
- College of Massage Therapists of Newfoundland and Labrador
- College of Massage Therapists of New Brunswick
- College of Massage Therapists of Prince Edward Island

These provinces list the therapists' credentials online for the public and use a Quality Assurance Programme that ensures that course content maintains a high level of standard and quality of care for clients (Federation of Massage Therapy Regulatory Authorities of Canada, 2018). Additionally, provinces with regulatory bodies also investigate complaints and can issue disciplinary actions by law.

Currently, each regulated province restricts the title and accreditation of Massage Therapist (MT) or Registered Massage Therapist (RMT) to those who have achieved qualifications outlined by their regulatory body. In unregulated provinces however, any individual can use the title of massage therapist. (College of Massage Therapists of Ontario, n.d.).

### Scope of Practice

Massage therapy is focused on preventing and rehabilitating soft tissues that might be causes of discomfort and/or pain. As such, there are a variety of massage therapy practices, techniques and modalities to achieve prevention and rehabilitation. It is estimated that there are approximately 200 different massage therapy variations that are currently recognized around the world. Approximately 12% of these are trademarked with standardized educational and training components (Porcino et al., 2011). Other modalities such as reflexology and aromatherapy are also sometimes categorized within the scope of massage therapy of some provinces but are not regulated with standard competencies or education (Hollis & Jones, 2009; Porcino et al., 2011). Acupuncture is also considered a form of massage therapy as outlined by the Massage Therapy Act, 1991, in Ontario. This is because acupuncture can be considered a form of manipulation.

Application of acupuncture, however, requires additional training and certifications set by a college (College of Massage Therapists of Ontario, n.d.). This demonstrates the wide range of techniques and certifications massage therapists can hold.

Duties of a massage therapist can include the following:

- Provide an assessment of clients using range of motion and muscle tests
- Describe treatment plans and how they might benefit from massage therapy
- Perform massage techniques by treating soft tissues and joints through a wide variety of treatment methods
- Suggest at home care a client can do to help rehabilitate, stretch or strengthen muscles
- Coordinate care with other health providers such as physiotherapists, physicians and occupational therapists to achieve optimal health for the client
- Maintain accurate and up to date client charts

## Education

Two organizations which provide guidance on massage therapy education in Canada include the Canadian Council of Massage Therapy Schools (CCMTS) and Canadian Massage Therapy Council for Accreditation (CMTCA). The CCMTS is a non-profit association that advocates and promotes quality training and institutional accountability. The CMTCA is an organization that independently reviews the standards of massage therapy programs in Canada.

The College of Massage Therapists for British Columbia, Newfoundland and Labrador, New Brunswick and Ontario revised in September of 2014 the Inter-Jurisdictional Practice Competencies and Performance Indicators (PC/PIs) for Massage Therapists at Entry-to-Practice (College of Massage Therapists of Ontario, 2016; Federation of Massage Therapy Regulatory Authorities of Canada, 2016). This document outlines the professional and entry-to-practice expectations to which all newly registered members must adhere.

According to this document, a practice competency is defined as “a description of a task that is performed in practice, and which can be carried out to a specified level of proficiency.” Practice Competencies are grouped into the following categories based on areas of practice:

1. Professional Practice
  - i. Communication
  - ii. Professionalism
  - iii. Therapeutic Relationship
2. Assessment
3. Treatment
  - i. Treatment Principles
  - ii. Massage Techniques
  - iii. Therapeutic Exercise
  - iv. Thermal Applications

According to this document, entry-level massage therapy education programs should involve learning and assessment in three environments:

1. The *academic environment* facilitates learning in a classroom setting to gain foundational knowledge and understanding of the required performance indicators.
2. The *simulated environment* equips students with practical skills that will strengthen communication and interpersonal abilities.
3. The *clinical environment* places the students in settings where they will interact directly with patients.

Further, entry-level massage therapists are expected to have the knowledge and skills to assess and treat common conditions, refer to Table 1. They are expected to understand the etiology and physical manifestations of common conditions to accurately and effectively assess and treat these disorders.

**TABLE 1.** Performance indicators and competencies for massage therapists

<b>1. Common clinical conditions that present as variables of:</b>		<b>b.</b> Conditions of the peripheral nervous system	
<b>a.</b> Stress		<b>c.</b> General neurological conditions	
<b>b.</b> Pain		<b>5. Orthopedic conditions:</b>	
<b>c.</b> Mood		<b>a.</b> Conditions of the bone and periosteum	
<b>d.</b> Anxiety		<b>b.</b> Conditions of the muscles and tendons	
<b>e.</b> Sleep		<b>c.</b> Conditions of the fascia	
<b>f.</b> Cognition		<b>d.</b> Conditions of the skin and connective tissue	
<b>2. Conditions with multi-factorial considerations:</b>		<b>e.</b> Conditions of the synovial joints, cartilage, ligaments and bursa	
<b>a.</b> Inflammation		<b>f.</b> Systemic myofascial and orthopedic conditions	
<b>b.</b> Infection		<b>6. Post-surgical conditions:</b>	
<b>c.</b> Scarring		<b>a.</b> Conditions involving orthopedic interventions	
<b>d.</b> Swelling		<b>b.</b> Conditions involving artificial openings	
<b>e.</b> Congestion		<b>c.</b> Conditions involving implants	
<b>f.</b> Movement restrictions		<b>7. Systemic conditions:</b>	
<b>g.</b> Malignancy		<b>a.</b> Conditions of the cardiovascular system	
<b>h.</b> Trauma and abuse		<b>b.</b> Conditions of the digestive system	
<b>3. Stages of life:</b>		<b>c.</b> Conditions of the endocrine system	
<b>a.</b> Pregnancy		<b>d.</b> Conditions of the gastrointestinal system	
<b>b.</b> Infancy and childhood		<b>e.</b> Conditions of the immune system	
<b>c.</b> Adolescence		<b>f.</b> Conditions of the integumentary system	
<b>d.</b> Adulthood		<b>g.</b> Conditions of the lymphatic system	
<b>e.</b> Senior years		<b>h.</b> Conditions of the reproductive system	
<b>f.</b> End of life		<b>i.</b> Conditions of the respiratory system	
<b>4. Neurological conditions:</b>		<b>j.</b> Conditions of the urinary system	
<b>a.</b> Conditions of the central nervous system			

Source: (Federation of Massage Therapy Regulatory Authorities of Canada, 2016)

## Establishing Standards and Program Requirements

In 2020, Baskwill and colleagues conducted an environmental scan of the massage therapy educational programs in Canada and interviewed several participants in the industry. Their findings developed four key themes including: variation, isolation, stagnation and accreditation. The variation theme described the lack of consistent and quality of content across the programs. There appears to be a wide range of topics, knowledge and skills disseminated in these programs. Isolation reflected that many programs lacked industry connections or opportunities to facilitate relationships with accreditors, regulators or colleagues. Stagnation encompassed the failure to progress with new evidence and topical issues within the industry. Participants described a lack of growth within the programs. And lastly, accreditation was identified as success but also a significant challenge with its own set of barriers.

## Provincial Massage Therapy Training Programs

There are close to 70 massage therapy education programs in Canada, with the majority offered from private education institutions. Some programs are accredited from a national body such as the CMTCA while others are accredited by private colleges and associations. Other programs, such as those in Manitoba, are not accredited by a governing body at this time. The longest running massage therapy education program established in Canada is the Canadian College of Massage and Hydrotherapy (CCMH). In 2019, CCMH became the first private massage therapy college to achieve full accreditation from the CMTCA.

### British Columbia

British Columbia offers a number of options for massage therapy education. If the intent is to become a registered massage therapist (RMT) then certification from an institution that is recognized and accredited by the Private Career Training Institutions Agency (PCTIA) is required. PCTIA-registered and accredited massage therapy education programs currently include the following:

- [Langara College](#)
- [Okanagan Valley College of Massage Therapy](#)
- [CDI College](#)
- [Vancouver College of Massage Therapy](#)
- [West Coast College of Massage Therapy](#)

### Alberta

The Massage Therapy Association of Alberta recognizes schools from Ontario, British Columbia, Newfoundland and Labrador — the five provinces with regulations for the massage therapy profession. They also recognize two of their own educational institutions and have three additional pending approval.

- [MH Vicars School of Massage Therapy](#)
- [South Edmonton School of Massage Therapy](#)

- [Mount Royal University](#)
- [Professional Institute of Massage Therapy](#)
- [CDI Edmonton North](#)

### Saskatchewan

To become a registered massage therapist in Saskatchewan, a candidate must complete the 2200-hour curriculum-based massage therapy from one of the following institutions:

- [Western College of Remedial Massage Therapies](#)
- [McKay School of Massage and Hydrotherapy](#)
- [Professional Institute of Massage Therapy](#)

There is also a requirement for the candidate to achieve a minimum score of 75% on the written and practical competency-based exam. Additionally, all candidates are required to register with the Massage Therapy Association of Saskatchewan and carry at least \$2 million malpractice and liability insurance.

### Manitoba

There are four approved schools in Manitoba, which also refer back to the practice and performance indicators outlined in the Inter-Jurisdictional Practice Competencies and Performance Indicators. The programs offered are two years in length and fulfill the 2200 hour requirement. These schools include:

- [Evolve College of Massage Therapy \(previously Massage Therapy College of Manitoba\)](#)
- [Robertson College](#)
- [Wellington College of Remedial Massage Therapy, Inc.](#)
- [Hua Xia Acupuncture, Massage, Herb College](#)

These four schools are also members of the Canadian Council of Massage Therapy.

### Ontario

There are many educational programs available in Ontario that meet the requirements set by the College of Massage Therapy of Ontario (CMTO).

In addition to the educational programs, therapists in Ontario are also required to become members of the college. The following is a list of institutions in Ontario that offer massage therapy programs:

- [Algonquin College](#)
- [Bryan College of Applied Health and Business Sciences](#)
- [Canadian College of Health Science and Technology](#)
- [Centennial College of Applied Arts and Technology](#)
- [College of Traditional Chinese Medicine Canada](#)
- [Collège Boreal](#)
- [D’Arcy Lane Institute](#)
- [Elegance School of Esthetics](#)
- [Fanshawe College](#)
- [Georgian College](#)
- [Humber College of Applied Arts & Technology](#)
- [Institute of Complementary & Alternative Therapies](#)
- [International Academy of Massage Inc.](#)
- [Kikkawa College](#)
- [Lambton College of Applied Arts & Technology](#)
- [Medix School](#)
- [Mohawk College of Applied Arts and Technology](#)
- [National Institute](#)
- [Northern College](#)
- [Ontario College of Health & Technology](#)
- [Pharma-Medical Science College of Canada](#)
- [Protégé School](#)
- [Royal Canadian College of Massage Therapy](#)

- [Sir Sandford Fleming College of Applied Arts & Technology](#)
- [Sutherland-Chan School](#)
- [Trillium College](#)
- [Wellsprings College of Massage Therapy and Esthetics](#)
- [Westervelt College](#)

## Quebec

Massage therapy education in Quebec is managed by *la formation de massothérapie* in Quebec. This organization provides information about massage therapy and its professional standards in Quebec. The following schools meet the requirements for the massage therapy profession in Quebec:

- [École de massothérapie Au centre de soi](#)
- [Centre Orchidée](#)
- [École de massage Claude Delisle](#)
- [École Équilibre et Détente Inc](#)
- [L’Attitude](#)
- [Centre de Formation en Médecines Alternatives de Granby](#)
- [École de massothérapie Massotech](#)
- [Institut Kiné-Concept](#)
- [Accès Trager](#)
- [Guijek, Institut Québécois pour la Santé Intégrale](#)
- [École de Tao Shiatsu du Dragon et Phoenix](#)

## New Brunswick

The College of Massage Therapy of New Brunswick (CMTNB) adopts the same standards as are used in the provinces with legislated regulation. The college also directs students who want to study in Quebec and then practice in New Brunswick to the [Académie](#) in Rimouski.



## Nova Scotia

There are four approved programs in Nova Scotia for massage therapy. These programs reflect the same components contained in the “core curriculum” of the College of Massage Therapists of Ontario.

The four colleges include:

- [Canadian College of Massage and Hydrotherapy](#)
- [ICT Northumberland College](#)
- [Eastern College](#)
- [Island Career Academy](#)

## Prince Edward Island

Prince Edward Island does not have any massage therapy programs. Individuals must complete a program elsewhere. The College of Massage Therapists of Prince Edward Island, however, do have the following requirements for practicing therapists:

- Successfully completed a post-secondary diploma or certificate in massage therapy within the last 3 years (minimum 2200-hour program)
- Successfully completed an exam from a regulated body for massage therapy (currently available in BC, Ontario, NB or NFLD)

## Sports Massage

Sports massage is additional accreditation massage therapists can pursue to increase their scope of practice and focus on a particular population. Similar to traditional definitions of massage therapy, sports massage is contained to specific athletic purposes. The governing body for sports massage in Canada is the Canadian Sport Massage Therapy Association (CSMTA). To become a member of the CSMTA, an individual must complete the National Sport Massage Certification Program which is the only certification program for Sport Massage in North America. Initially, a massage therapist must become a candidate member with the Sport Massage Therapy Association and begin accumulating designated sports massage hours (CSMTA/ACMS, n.d.). These hours include the following requirements:

- maximum of 100 event hours as a student at sport specific outreaches
- minimum 100 hours with contact and non-contact teams
- minimum of 100 event hours
- maximum 50 hours organizing medical/SMT participation at events
- Work among at least 3 different sports
- Complete Sport First Responder certification
- Complete 500 hours of clinical experience as a registered massage therapist.

A candidate is then eligible to complete the written exam after a minimum of 350 hours have been documented. Once the 500 hours are completed, a candidate is eligible to complete the practical exam administered by the associated college or regulating body.

## Newfoundland and Labrador

There are three educational programs available to applicants including:

- [Academy Canada Career College](#) (Corner Brook)
- [Eastern College Massage Therapy](#)
- [Academy Canada Career College](#) (St John's)

In sum, massage therapy curriculum varies from province to province reflecting the variability in requirements of their associated provincial regulation. With the exception of Ontario, massage therapists are required to complete a minimum of 18–22 months in an educational program in massage therapy from an accredited school followed by a period of supervised practical training (Government of Canada, 2012) although this varies by province. There is also a requirement to complete written and practical exams administered by the college the therapist is registered to. The candidate will also be required to submit evidence of an up to date CPR and First Aid certification.

Provinces vary in their requirements for practice including minimum number of hours to qualify for completion. Prerequisites often include completion of a high-school diploma.

## Massage Therapy Associations

In each jurisdiction, there is a professional association for massage therapy that is established by the profession and acts in the interest of the profession. For example, in Ontario there is a regulatory body, the College of Massage Therapists of Ontario and an association, Registered Massage Therapists Association of Ontario.

The Canadian Massage Therapy Alliance (CMTA) is the current national alliance that oversees the provincial associations. Associations affiliated with CMTA agree to a common set of requirements that ensure successful massage therapy graduates have completed a recognized curriculum of the 2200-hour program. Below are the 9 associations that adhere to the standards outlined by CMTA:

**TABLE 2:** Provincial Massage Therapy Associations

Province	Association(s)
British Columbia	<a href="#">Massage Therapists' Association of British Columbia</a>
Manitoba	<a href="#">Massage Therapy Association of Manitoba</a> which is also their regulatory body
New Brunswick	<a href="#">The New Brunswick Massotherapy Association</a> <a href="#">Association of New Brunswick Massage Therapists</a>
Newfoundland	<a href="#">The Newfoundland and Labrador Massage Therapists' Association</a>
Nova Scotia	<a href="#">Massage Therapists Association of Nova Scotia</a>
Ontario	<a href="#">Registered Massage Therapists' Association of Ontario</a>
Prince Edward Island	<a href="#">Prince Edward Island Massage Therapy Association</a>
Saskatchewan	<a href="#">The Massage Therapist Association of Saskatchewan</a>

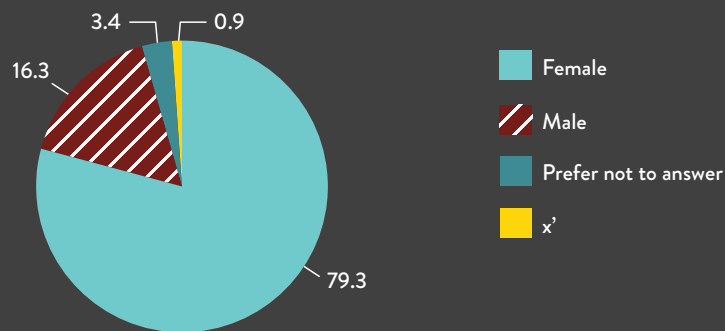
## Demographic Profile

In a submission to the House of Commons Standing Committee on Finance, the CMTA stated they were supporting over 19,500 registered massage therapists practicing throughout Canada (2019). Since then, they have updated their count of RMTs in Canada to over 23,000 on their website (n.d.). There is, however, little standardized data on the current workforce

of massage therapists across Canada. This is in part due to the inconsistencies in regulation, which would include the development of a register of practitioners.

Some of the most recent and detailed demographic data can be found from Ontario, the province that documented 13,684 registered massage therapists in 2020 (CBC News, 2022). The data below on gender distribution and age distribution are from the CMTO.

**Figure 2: Identified gender of RMTs in Ontario**



Source: CMTO, 2022

### Gender Distribution

In a survey included in the CMTO's latest environmental scan, gender distribution was divided into the following categories: male, female, prefer not to answer, and 'x' (mostly listing non-binary, two spirited and gender fluid) (2022). Figure 2 below illustrates the results. Here, we can see the profession not only remains predominantly female but is also becoming more inclusive in their demographic data and extraction.

### Age Distribution

Respondents to the CMTO survey indicate that most RMTs are between the ages of 31–60. Within these years, many are 41–50 (29.5%). However, other groups such as 31–40 (26%) and 51–60 (21%) are not too far off (CMTO, 2022).

### Practice Setting

RMTs practice in a variety of settings including home clinics, group clinics, spas, and rehabilitation centres. In Ontario, most RMTs work in multi-disciplinary clinics (32%), independent office locations (29%) and independent home clinics (22.5%) (CMTO, 2022). Similarly, throughout Canada, whether working “on their own or as part of a team,” many work in private practice (WorkBC, n.d.). According to the CMTA,

most can and should be viewed as “predominantly small business owners” or “independent contractors.” It is important to remember that this distinction is being made to emphasize the extra support and consideration they may need rather than isolate the profession since, while many are independent, they continue to work “closely with primary care and other allied health providers.” (2019)

### Remuneration

According to the Government of Canada's Job Bank, the median salary for a massage therapist is \$31.30 per hour, with a low of \$17 and a high of \$55 (2023). While data is not available for each province and/or territory, we can see in Table 4, below, that British Columbia, Ontario, and Alberta simultaneously offer some of the lowest and highest wages.

**TABLE 3:** Massage therapy wages (\$/hour) in Canada

Area	Low (\$/hour)	Median (\$/hour)	High (\$/hour)
Canada	17.00	31.31	55.00
Alberta	19.77	35.00	55.00
British Columbia	15.65	32.00	67.50
Manitoba	19.43	40.06	51.71
New Brunswick	20.00	37.85	49.00
Nova Scotia	18.50	36.52	51.86
Ontario	17.16	36.50	55.36
Quebec	16.00	21.97	32.00
Newfoundland and Labrador	N/A	N/A	N/A
Northwest Territories	N/A	N/A	N/A
Nunavut	N/A	N/A	N/A
Prince Edward Island	N/A	N/A	N/A
Saskatchewan	N/A	N/A	N/A
Yukon Territory	N/A	N/A	N/A

Source: [Job Bank, 2022](#)

## Working Hours

According to the survey:

- Registered massage therapists average 21 hours weekly of direct patient care in a clinical practice setting
- They see an average of 19.3 patients per week
- Just over half of the respondents indicated that they would like to increase their direct patient care by 10 hours

## Additional Survey Results:

- Approximately 91% of income is earned via direct patient care
- Direct patient care income for 2012 was \$39,163
- The remaining income from massage related services is most often earned through clinic management and instruction
- A little over half of the respondents are satisfied with their pay but would welcome more clinical hours

In light of the lack of data on massage therapists in Canada, the CCMTS submitted a letter to the National Occupational Classification in 2011 calling for a reconsideration of the reclassification for massage therapy. The recommendation was to remove massage therapist from category 3235, Other Technical Occupations in Therapy and Assessment to a category specifically designated to massage therapy as is the case with physiotherapy. As of 2020 it is classified under Technical Occupations in Health in classification 3236 Massage therapists. This same category includes paramedics and licensed practical nurses (CMTO, n.d.).

## Demand and Coverage of Massage Therapy Services

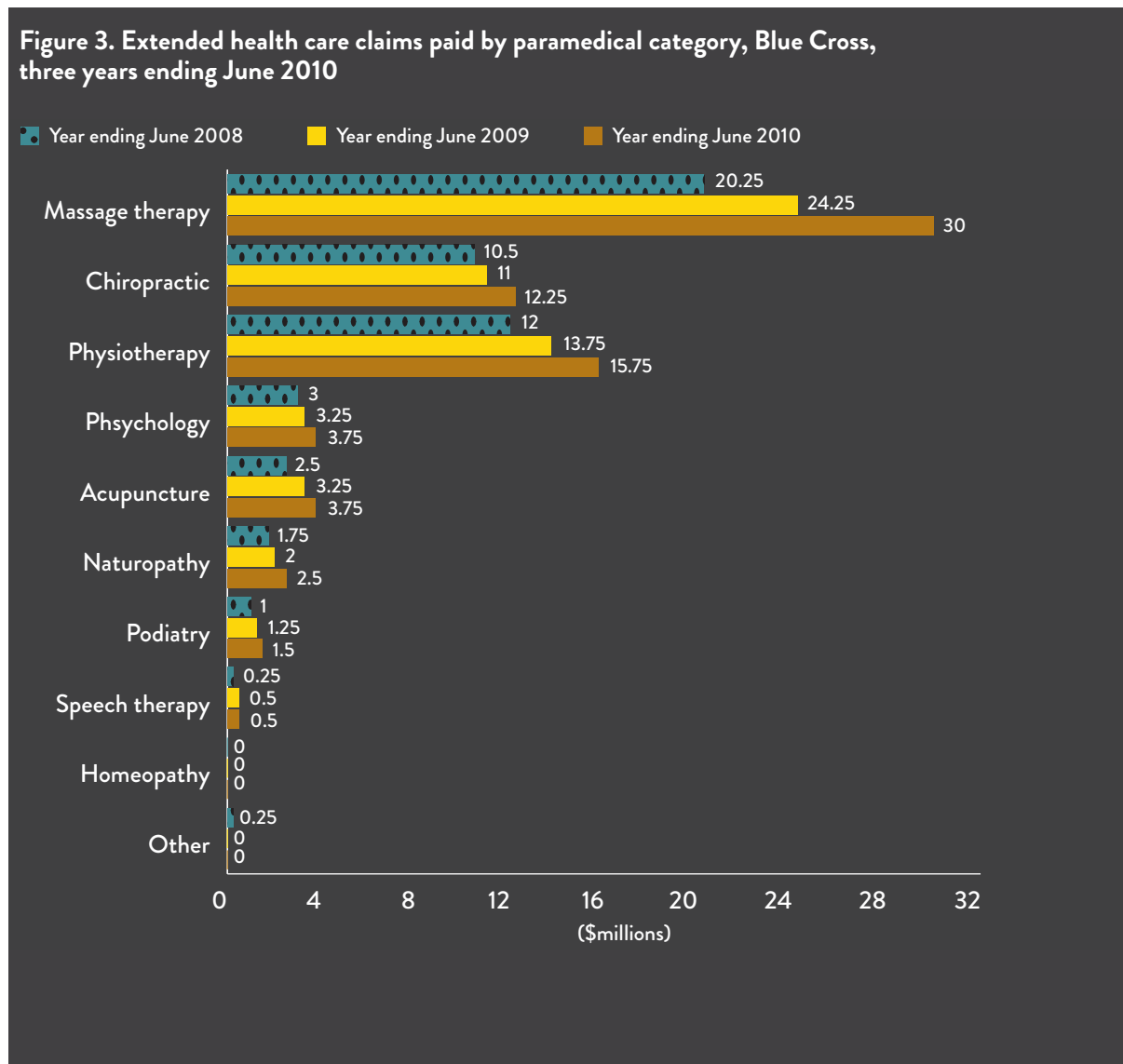
Massage therapy is an occupation that is increasingly in demand. While more Canadians are seeking massages, many students were unable to complete their education over the past few years due to COVID-19 restrictions (CBC News, 2022). The hands-on nature of the profession made it difficult for aspiring massage therapists to complete the necessary tests to acquire their registration.

Demand is expected to continue rising as more Canadians learn about, and focus on, their overall health and wellbeing (CBC News, 2022; Oxford College, 2019). After chiropractic, massage therapy is the second most utilized form of complementary and alternative health care in Canada (Gowan-Moody & Baskwill, 2006).

According to the results from the 2013 RMTAO survey, individuals pay for massage therapy through five different pathways: extended health benefits submitted by patient, extended health insurance benefits submitted by therapist, personal funds, auto insurance and workplace safety and insurance board (WSIB). The CMTA identifies the two criteria of an individual insurance carrier (CMTA, n.d.):

1. CIGNA covers massage therapy when provided as one component of a medically necessary and covered comprehensive physical therapy or chiropractic treatment plan.
2. CIGNA does not cover massage therapy when it is provided in the absence of other therapeutic modalities because it is considered not medically necessary.

CMTA provided data on how massage therapy fits into usage of extended health care benefits. These figures illustrate the significant uptake of massage therapy when insurance coverage is provided. Each year from 2008–2010, the use of massage therapy coverage from the Blue Cross increased.



## The Influence of the COVID-19 Pandemic on the Massage Therapy Profession

It was January 25, 2020, when the first presumptive positive case of COVID-19 was identified in Canada (The Canadian Press, 2021). This began a journey of public health measures and change to living that was completely unprecedented. In Canada, provincial governments were responsible for addressing and implementing public health measures for their populations. Provinces with the highest number of cases and therefore the strictest COVID-19 regulations were in Ontario.

For massage therapists this meant significant change to their practice. In provinces with regulation, massage therapists were still allowed to operate but under very strict guidelines. The College of Massage Therapists of Ontario for example, published an 11-page document detailing changes to practice guidelines (CMTO, 2020). In addition to common public health care measures including mandatory masking, hand sanitization with alcohol concentrations between 70–90%, and frequent, regular self-monitoring; changes to massage therapy practice included changes to the work environment, cleaning, and business processes. Many colleges and associations required members to review infection control and public health education. Massage therapists were required to mask, gown and perform consistent hand hygiene—including how to don and doff PPE safely (Registered Massage Therapists Association of BC, n.d.).

## Conclusion

There are four key concluding points regarding massage therapy practice in Canada:

1. Massage therapy provides prevention and rehabilitation for musculoskeletal disorders, physiological dysfunction, injuries and pain through a different bodywork modality.
2. Education to become a registered massage therapist differs by province, with most programs taking about two years to complete.
3. There are more than 170 different variations of massage therapy that are recognized but only a small number are standardized and regulated. This includes therapies such as Swedish massage, aromatherapy and acupuncture. As a result, there are a number of additional credentials and certifications available to massage therapists.
4. There are a number of different settings available for the profession to practice. This includes spas, clinics, sports therapy centres, and hospitals.

## Acronyms

RMT	Registered Massage Therapist
MT	Massage Therapist
WSIB	Workplace Safety and Insurance Board
TMB	Therapeutic Massage Bodywork
CMTO	College of Massage Therapy of Ontario
CCMTS	Canadian Council of Massage Therapy Schools
CMTA	Canadian Massage Therapy Association
CMMOTA	Canadian Massage & Manual Osteopathic Therapists Association
CSMTA	Canadian Sport Massage Therapy Association
FOMTRAC	Federation of Massage Therapy Regulatory Authorities of Canada
PEIMTA	Prince Edward Island Massage Therapy Association
MTAS	Massage Therapy Association of Saskatchewan

MTAM	Massage Therapy Association of Manitoba	CBC News. (2022). <i>High demand, not enough massage therapists means longer wait times.</i> <a href="https://www.cbc.ca/news/canada/kitchener-waterloo/pandemic-registered-massage-therapists-short-age-graduate-1.6525071">https://www.cbc.ca/news/canada/kitchener-waterloo/pandemic-registered-massage-therapists-short-age-graduate-1.6525071</a>
NWMTA	Northwest Territories Massage Therapists Association	
MTANS	Massage Therapists' Association of Nova Scotia	College of Massage Therapists of Ontario. (n.d.). <i>About the Profession – College of Massage Therapists of Ontario.</i> Retrieved from <a href="http://www.cmtto.com/about-the-profession/">http://www.cmtto.com/about-the-profession/</a>
MTAA	Massage Therapist Association of Alberta	
RMTBC	Registered Massage Therapists' Association of British Columbia	College of Massage Therapists of Ontario. (2016). <i>Inter-jurisdictional Practice Competencies and Performance Indicators – College of Massage Therapists of Ontario.</i> <a href="https://www.cmtto.com/about-the-profession/interjurisdictional-practice-competencies-and-performance-indicators/">https://www.cmtto.com/about-the-profession/interjurisdictional-practice-competencies-and-performance-indicators/</a>
NLMTA	Newfoundland and Labrador Massage Therapists' Association	
RMTAO	Registered Massage Therapy Association of Ontario	College of Massage Therapists of Ontario. (2020). <i>COVID-19 Pandemic – Practice Guidance for Massage Therapists.</i> <a href="https://www.cmtto.com/assets/COVID-19-Pandemic-Practice-Guidance-for-Massage-Therapists.pdf">https://www.cmtto.com/assets/COVID-19-Pandemic-Practice-Guidance-for-Massage-Therapists.pdf</a>
RMQ	Regroupement des massothérapeutes du Québec	
TC-CMTA	Transitional Council for the College of Massage Therapy of Alberta	
NHPC	Natural Health Practitioners of Canada	

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