

The CMTCA standards development process

The development of the Canadian Massage Therapy Council for Accreditation (CMTCA) standards for massage therapy education programs followed an extensive process of research, review, consultation, and revision. The result is a thorough and rigorous set of national standards that guides education programs toward excellence and gives students confidence in their education and their ability to offer safe, effective, and ethical massage therapy.

The standards are specific without being overly prescriptive, allowing for flexibility in addressing the unique needs of the various massage therapy education programs across the country.

Finally, they reflect the commitment to professionalism and high quality expected of all respected healthcare educators and practitioners.

Background

1. In January 2013, the Federation of Massage Therapy Regulatory Authorities of Canada (FOMTRAC) engaged a consultant to create a stakeholder-driven action plan to establish national accreditation for massage therapy education programs. To provide project direction, a National Accreditation Planning Committee was formed, with representation from:
 - Canadian Council of Massage Therapy Schools
 - Canadian Massage Therapist Alliance (now the Massage Therapy Alliance of Canada)
 - College of Massage Therapists of British Columbia
 - Massage Therapists' Association of British Columbia
 - College of Massage Therapists of Ontario
 - Ontario Council of Private Massage Therapy Colleges
 - Heads of Massage Therapy Programs in Ontario Community Colleges
 - Registered Massage Therapists' Association of Ontario
 - College of Massage Therapists of Newfoundland and Labrador
 - The Newfoundland and Labrador Massage Therapists' Association
2. Over an eight-month period in 2013, the committee developed a report intended to stimulate discussion of and support for establishing national accreditation and provide an action plan and recommendations. This work drew heavily on the Association of Accrediting Agencies of Canada's Guidelines for Good Practice of Accreditation of Professional Programs. In addition, regular communication bulletins were issued to education programs, professional associations, and government agencies, to broaden involvement and build a national distribution list.
3. The report was presented at a workshop in October 2013, where the 61 participants strongly supported the vision and the approach, and identified issues for future



consideration. Feedback from the workshop was incorporated and the report was finalized.

4. A central recommendation was the formation of a specific-purpose organization to develop and administer the accreditation standards and process. Governance, policy, and operational recommendations were also identified. The vision was that the standards be:
 - Based on the Inter-Jurisdictional Practice Competencies and Performance Indicators for Massage Therapists at Entry-to-Practice (PCs/PIs) approved by the regulated provinces in 2012 (and incorporate future updates to that document)
 - Flexible in their application, focusing more on student learning outcomes produced by massage therapy education programs than on the program structure and process
 - Developed in consultation with stakeholders
5. The Canadian Massage Therapy Council for Accreditation (CMTCA) was incorporated on July 22, 2014. An executive director with extensive experience in standards development and adult learning and education theory and practice was hired, with a mandate to develop leading edge standards based on the PCs/PIs and build buy-in for and engagement with the accreditation process.

Literature review and initial drafts

6. In October 2015, a twelve-member Standards Advisory Committee (SAC), with membership consisting of massage therapy regulatory and education professionals from across the country, was struck.
7. Using the Accreditation Planning Committee's vision as a starting point and armed with an outline of key topics, CMTCA facilitated an intensive two-day session where SAC members discussed, analyzed, and evaluated resources and standards from:
 - CMTBC Basis of Accreditation for Educational Programs in Massage Therapy
 - Canadian Association of Schools of Nursing (Accreditation Program Standards)
 - Canadian Engineering Accreditation Board (Accreditation Criteria and Procedures)
 - Canadian Medical Association (Conjoint Accreditation Services Requirements for Accreditation)
 - Commission on Massage Therapy Accreditation (USA)
 - Commission on Accreditation of Allied Health Education Programs (USA)

Using a highly structured, facilitated approach, the group was able to identify relevant content and approaches to be included in a quality accreditation process for massage therapy education programs. As envisioned, the standards would be based on the practice competencies and performance indicators. However, the intent was not to simply cut and paste from the competencies and indicators but to create a full set of standards specifically tailored to the Canadian massage therapy education context.

8. Based on this work, further review of the work of the Commission on Accreditation for Allied Health Education Programs, and a review of the Accreditation Standards for Physiotherapy Education Programs in Canada, an initial draft of the standards was

developed and sent to SAC members for their feedback. As questions and ideas were raised, two subsequent drafts were circulated for review and feedback from the SAC.

National consultation

9. In March 2016, the draft standards were sent for national consultation to massage therapy stakeholders across the country. This included regulators, associations (who also sent the standards to their members), and education programs. Extensive and detailed feedback was received from 155 respondents (although the reach was greater as 38 responses came from groups of two to more than 20 people) through Survey Monkey and by email and phone.
10. The standards were also sent to an internationally renowned health care accreditation expert who provided feedback on the quality of the standards, and to provincial ministries of education.
11. Following a thorough content analysis of the consultation results as well as a review of the Canadian Council for Accreditation of Pharmacy Programs' Standards for Accreditation of Pharmacy Technician Programs in Canada, the standards were significantly revised to address common themes and issues identified. In particular, the approaches to curriculum content and assessing program and jurisdictional requirements were amended. SAC members were involved in these discussions and provided their feedback to the changes.
12. CMTCA planned and conducted eight site visits across the country to pilot test the standards and the process. These took place from April to June 2016 and involved:
 - Identifying the pilot test sites, which consisted of public and private massage therapy education programs in regulated and unregulated provinces
 - Providing the pilot site education programs with the draft standards and information on the process, obtaining necessary consents, and developing site visit schedules for each pilot site
 - Recruiting, selecting, and providing a five-day training session for 24 surveyors, of whom 10 participated in the pilot tests
 - Developing an evaluation framework and analyzing evaluation results
13. Pilot test evaluation results were overwhelmingly positive. Respondents also offered insightful and useful suggestions for improvement. These were incorporated as appropriate into the standards and the accreditation process, following which the SAC completed a final review.
14. As per article 14, Duty to Consult, in the CMTCA bylaws, the standards were circulated to the Canadian Massage Therapist Alliance (CMTA), the Canadian Council of Massage Therapy Schools (CCMTS), and Federation of Massage Therapy Regulatory Authorities of Canada (FOMTRAC) on August 3, 2016. These organizations have 60 days to provide a final review of the standards before approval by the board of directors.

Approval

The standards and the accreditation process were approved by the Board of Directors March 2017.