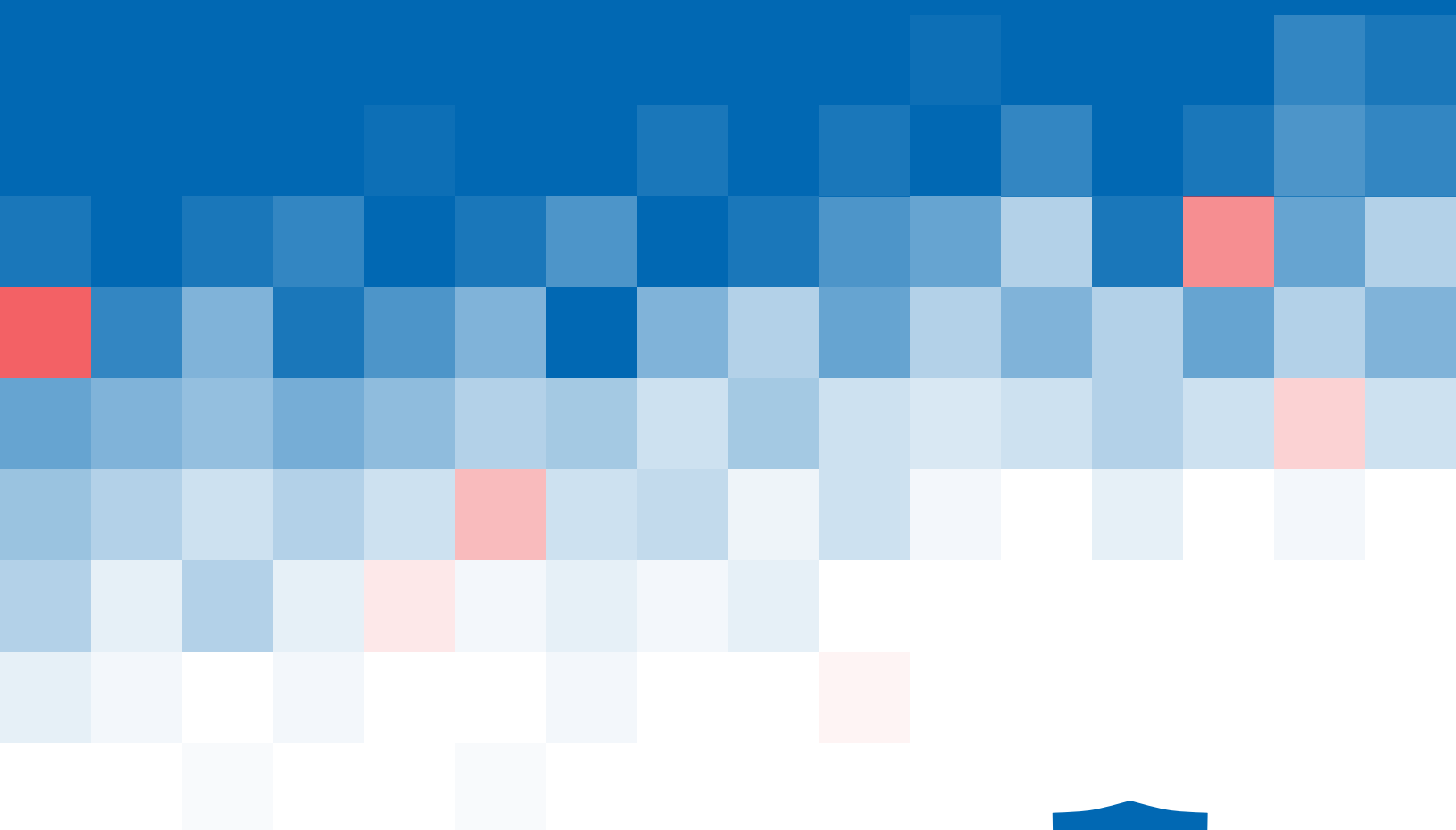


Sexual Abuse Prevention Plan



2022-23



College of
Massage
Therapists of
Ontario

2022-23 Sexual Abuse Prevention Plan

Introduction

The College of Massage Therapists of Ontario (CMTO) is committed to preventing and addressing the sexual abuse of clients by Registered Massage Therapists (RMTs/MTs or registrants). CMTO takes this responsibility seriously and has adopted several initiatives to support a **zero tolerance** approach to sexual abuse.

The number of sexual abuse complaints received by CMTO is increasing. This may be influenced by society's expectations about touch and that Massage Therapy is a treatment based on touch and often practised in a private, closed space. A comprehensive and effective Sexual Abuse Prevention Plan is important to protecting the public and promoting professional and ethical Massage Therapy treatment. CMTO is also promoting the passage of new regulations that will help ensure high quality Massage Therapy education.

The Sexual Abuse Prevention Plan is reviewed and updated annually by the Client Relations Committee (CRC), which reports to CMTO's Council. Each year's plan is reviewed and informed by an evaluation of the previous year's results and environmental changes.

CMTO's Sexual Abuse Prevention Plan complies with the [Regulated Health Professions Act, 1991](#) (RHPA). The purpose of this Plan is to outline CMTO's activities to prevent sexual abuse through the following initiatives:

- 1) [Education for Massage Therapy Students](#)
- 2) [Registrant Education](#)
- 3) [Training for College Administration](#)
- 4) [Funding for Therapy and Counselling](#)
- 5) [Provision of Information to the Public](#)
- 6) [Evaluation of the Sexual Abuse Prevention Plan](#)

Each initiative is described below and a summary table of deliverables planned for 2022-23 is available in [Attachment A](#).

1) Education for Massage Therapy Students

Learning about sexual abuse, and the obligations of regulated health professionals to prevent and report it begins long before individuals become registered with CMTO.

With this in mind, accreditation is key to CMTO's strategy to improve and ensure high quality Massage Therapy education. Ensuring that educational programs graduate qualified individuals is important to protecting the public. The variation in educational programs and the intimate/touch-based nature of Massage Therapy makes the need for accreditation more acute. CMTO requires applicants to complete an entry-to-practice exam to help prepare them for professional practice and ethical conduct, but accreditation is needed to ensure high quality education is in place. To enhance registrant knowledge, CMTO is also launching a jurisprudence program (to be in place in 2023).

2) Registrant Education

CMTO guides RMTs on sexual abuse prevention and reporting requirements through College policies, guidelines and Standards of Practice. These documents are publicly available on CMTO's website. An overview of CMTO's commitment to zero tolerance for any form of abuse, and its sexual abuse prevention policies and obligations are highlighted in [TouchPoint](#). CMTO publishes the number of complaints and reports of sexual abuse received each year in the College Performance Measurement Framework and publishes all discipline hearing summaries on [CMTO's website](#). Full versions of discipline decisions and reasons from January 1st, 2016, onward are published on the [Canadian Legal Information Institute \(CanLII\) website](#) to provide information for the public and other stakeholders.

Educating Massage Therapy Students on Sexual Abuse

2016: Released [Inter-jurisdictional Practice Competencies and Performance Indicators for Massage Therapists at Entry-to-Practice](#) with other Provincial regulators. This tool for educators includes concepts related to preventing sexual abuse.

2017: CMTO's Council approved standards for the Canadian Massage Therapy Council for Accreditation, including specific provisions to eradicate sexual abuse.

2021: Updated Standards of Practice on 1) Professional Boundaries and 2) Preventing Sexual Abuse. The Standards address professional communication, boundaries, use of recording devices, and the treatment of sensitive areas such as the gluteal region, inner thighs, chest and breasts.

Information on professional boundaries, the definition of sexual abuse, and prevention of sexual abuse are also included in the interactive CMTO e-Workshops that are held throughout the year.

In 2019, CMTO launched [STRiVE](#), the new Quality Assurance (QA) Program. As part of the redesign of CMTO's QA Program, 15 Career-Span Competencies were identified for the profession. Several of the Career-Span Competencies (e.g., acting with professional integrity; functioning in a client-centered manner) are linked to sexual abuse prevention. One of the Career Span Competencies is to "Apply the Principles of Sensitive Practice".

CMTO also refreshed its [Code of Ethics](#) in 2019. The Code of Ethics and accompanying [Glossary of Terms](#) are resources to support RMTs in understanding and applying the ethical principles and values which are foundational to the practice of the profession. The Code of Ethics is the foundation for the *STRiVE e-Learning Module: Professionalism and Ethics* which was completed by the majority of RMTs in 2021.

Proposed changes to the Professional Misconduct Regulation were also approved by CMTO's Council in 2019 and submitted to the Ministry of Health in 2020. One of the proposed amendments will make failing to take reasonable steps to prevent sexual abuse of a client or sexual misconduct toward a client by any person working under a registrant's direction or supervision, an act of professional misconduct. CMTO will also develop a guide to the Professional Misconduct Regulation to assist RMTs (and the public) in understanding the provisions.

Educating the Profession about Sexual Abuse

2017: Written Consent for Treating Sensitive Areas. The College made its recommended written consent process for treating sensitive areas a mandatory requirement in 2017. The requirement for written consent may prevent some cases of abuse, and where it cannot prevent abuse, it may make it easier to prove that sexual abuse occurred.

2019: RMTs are asked to declare at renewal that they understand their responsibilities as regulated health professionals for reporting and preventing sexual abuse. This declaration is now required annually.

In 2020, CMTO updated its Standards of Practice. The new Standards include [Prevention of Sexual Abuse](#), [Professional Boundaries](#), and [Draping and Physical Privacy](#). The Standards were consulted on broadly and feedback was provided by RMTs, the public and other stakeholders.

The *Standard of Practice: Draping and Physical Privacy* was developed with feedback from the Citizen Advisory Group.

In 2023, an online jurisprudence program will be introduced and will cover a variety of topics (i.e., Legislation and Regulations, Standards of Practice, Prevention of Sexual Abuse, and Professionalism and Ethics).

3) Training for College Administration

All CMTO staff and Council/Committee Members receive annual training about liaising with the public about sexual abuse complaints, and some staff receive annual training from experts in sexual abuse prevention and counselling. This training ensures that those involved with complaints or reports about sexual abuse have detailed knowledge of CMTO's responsibilities. The training provides an understanding of the impact of sexual abuse on individuals, families and society, and helps staff assist individuals who have been abused in a sensitive manner. CMTO staff who are involved in investigations also received trauma-informed investigation training.

4) Funding for Therapy and Counselling

Under the RHPA, all health regulatory colleges must establish programs to provide funding for therapy and counselling for patients/clients who have alleged being sexually abused by an RMT. CMTO's Client Relations Committee is responsible for overseeing this process, determining eligibility and administering the fund.

In 2018, CMTO's Council updated its [Funding for Therapy and Counselling Program](#) by passing a new policy that broadened the College's ability to provide funding to patients/clients who have been sexually abused by an RMT.

New provincial regulations were also enacted in 2018 that broaden clients' access to funding for therapy and counselling where an allegation of sexual abuse has been made. As a result of the policy/regulatory change, CMTO has experienced a sharp increase in the number of applications received for the Funding for Therapy and Counselling Program.

Important Changes to CMTO's Complaints and Discipline Process

To support sexual abuse complainants, CMTO has:

- Designated a specific staff resource with expertise on abuse for each complaint at the point of intake regarding sexual abuse.
- Increased Support for Witnesses – CMTO may cover the expenses for a support person for vulnerable witnesses that are testifying during a Discipline Committee hearing. In addition, the [Discipline Committee Rules](#) allow for a support person to be present and to sit near a witness while testifying. A Discipline Panel may allow a vulnerable witness to provide their testimony without seeing or being seen by the registrant if the Discipline Panel is of the opinion that this is necessary to obtain a full and candid account.
- Provided for the appointment of amicus counsel for sexual abuse matters in which the registrant is self-represented, so a witness is not cross-examined by their alleged perpetrator. Where a witness is vulnerable, and a registrant is not represented, the College will apply to have a representative appointed to conduct the cross-examination.

5) Provision of Information to the Public

CMTO updated and re-launched its website in 2022. CMTO's website provides client-centered information developed with the assistance of clients/patients. The new website includes information regarding sexual abuse prevention, an outline of the [complaints process](#), funding for therapy and counselling information and application, and contact information for the dedicated staff members responsible for responding to any questions or concerns. An annual



“[Look Before You Book](#)” campaign also helps ensure that the public is aware of CMTO’s [public register](#) (or “Find an RMT”).

The College also re-launched its public register in 2021. The public register clearly shows whether an RMT is authorized to practice and provides alerts about an RMT, including restrictions, investigations, and disciplinary matters.

CMTO also produces articles and videos on topics such as:

- [What to expect when visiting a Massage Therapist](#);
- [Professional boundaries](#); and
- [Look Before You Book](#).

[CMTO’s PDF document](#) (that can be printed and posted in RMTs’ practices) can be used to inform clients that Massage Therapy Standards of Practice are the same across all practice settings, that clients have specific rights and that CMTO is here to help with any concerns they might have.

6) Evaluation of Sexual Abuse Prevention Plan

Each year, CMTO evaluates the progress made in implementing the Sexual Abuse Prevention Plan and discusses how to improve its effectiveness going forward.

CMTO’s Council will continue to receive updates from the CRC, and CMTO will monitor the effectiveness of the measures and policies outlined above, and will discuss longer-term goals as part of its commitment to **zero tolerance** of sexual abuse.

Attachment A: Initiatives Planned for 2022-23

Initiative	Initiative Type	Completion Date	Lead Department
An online jurisprudence program will be developed and launched. The program will be shared with Massage Therapy educational programs.	Applicant and Registrant Education Massage Therapy Student Education	2023	Professional Practice
During renewal, RMTs will declare that they understand their responsibilities as regulated health professionals for reporting and preventing sexual abuse.	Registrant Education	Ongoing (annually)	Registration Services
Undertake annual training for College administration.	Training for College Administration	Ongoing (annually)	Policy and Communications / Professional Conduct
Undertake annual training for Committees involved with sexual abuse matters (i.e., ICRC and Discipline).	Training for College Administration	Ongoing (annually)	Professional Conduct
Digital campaign aimed at the public, on topics such as <i>Look Before You Book</i> and new Website content.	Provision of Information to the Public	Ongoing	Policy and Communications
Monitor and evaluate CMTO's Sexual Abuse Prevention Plan annually and discuss the goals of the Plan for the subsequent year.	Evaluation of Sexual Abuse Prevention Plan	Ongoing	Client Relations Committee