

Covid-19

A joint statement from The Osteopathic Council of New Zealand (OCNZ) and Osteopaths New Zealand (ONZ).

Kia ora,

The effects of the global covid-19 pandemic are being felt across every part of our daily lives and we do hope you and your families are all continuing to keep as well as you can during what is, and will continue to be for some time, a challenging period for everyone.

A number of osteopaths have been in touch with both OCNZ and ONZ recently, advocating that OCNZ should be doing more to lobby government, ACC or intervene in matters of clinical responsibility. We therefore wanted to take this opportunity to clarify the roles and responsibilities of our two organisations, as the Regulatory Authority (OCNZ) and the Professional Association (ONZ).



The Osteopathic Council was established by the Health Practitioners Competence Assurance Act 2003 (HPCA Act). Our principal role is public safety and maintaining public confidence in the profession. We do this through effective regulation and monitoring of the ongoing competency of the osteopathic profession. This regulatory framework includes, determining scope of practice, prescribing recognised qualifications, developing competencies and standards for the practice of osteopathy, assessing the competence of overseas practitioners and maintaining a system for complaints and concerns raised about osteopaths.

The Council can highlight the expected standards, the guidance provided by the government and its agencies across New Zealand and therefore enable your expert professional judgement. What we cannot do is provide clinical advice as to how osteopaths should implement those standards in specific circumstances, and we are not permitted in law to lobby for the profession. To provide an example, OCNZ produced the profession's new Telehealth Standards as we all went into lockdown, which are guidelines for New Zealand registered osteopaths to follow in support of patient safety. This allows you to conduct telehealth consultations with standards in place to protect the public. But we are not permitted to lobby

ACC to include osteopaths on their approved provider list for telehealth payments. For clarity, that lobbying process is being undertaken by ONZ as the professional association.

Although Council members may also be members of ONZ, the duty of Council members is to act in accordance with the aims, objectives and requirements of the Health Practitioners Competence Act. Council members are appointed by the Minister to oversee the profession, they are not elected by osteopaths to represent their professional interests.



Osteopaths New Zealand is the professional association representing the osteopathic profession in Aotearoa. Our purpose is to support, safeguard, and guide the osteopathic profession in New Zealand. This includes lobbying with governmental agencies such as ACC and the Ministry of Health, promoting the benefits of osteopathy to the public, and supporting the professional needs of ONZ members. In short, we actively represent the osteopathic profession in the healthcare environment. The ONZ Committee is made up of volunteers from the profession, who are elected annually by ONZ Members. Every committee member is passionate about osteopathy and motivated to elevate the osteopathic profession in Aotearoa.

Unlike registration and APC renewal with OCNZ, membership with ONZ is not a professional requirement for practicing osteopaths in NZ. The work that ONZ undertakes on behalf of the profession is only made possible by ONZ members, who actively invest in the health of the profession.

We are currently in very regular contact with ACC, as we actively lobby for osteopaths to be approved as ACC Telehealth providers. We are also in regular contact with OCNZ, who are supportive of providing the governance needed for osteopathic healthcare provided via Telehealth services. We are also liaising with the Ministry of Health regarding the list of Essential Services during this pandemic. It is part of our responsibility to look ahead, and what the timeline of this pandemic may mean for the osteopathic profession. Due to the uncertainty the current climate brings, we are supporting the profession by actively developing contingency plans for various potential outcomes, which include providing appropriate support for ONZ members.

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Whilst our two organisations have different roles within osteopathy, we do not work in isolation from each other. As Key Strategic Stakeholders for osteopathy in NZ, we are in regular contact with each other as well as other professional bodies and regulators, particularly during these challenging times. When OCNZ respond to queries by saying a particular issue may be best considered by ONZ, this is due to the recognition that our organisations' roles, responsibilities, and areas of expertise are quite different.

Together we recognise the vast challenges that the profession is facing right now, and the difficult decisions that have been made, and continue to be made. Closing one's practice or moving to telehealth consultations in lieu of hands-on care, which is at the heart of osteopathy, is not just a financial challenge, but for many an emotional one also.

During these difficult times, OCNZ will continue to put the interests of patients at the heart of all decision making. Likewise, ONZ will continue to do the same for its members and the wider osteopathic profession.

Authorised by:

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Tim Friedlander, OCNZ Chairperson

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References:

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