



# POSITION STATEMENT

Use of the “physiotherapy” descriptor

## POSITION

The Ontario Physiotherapy Association (OPA) believes that physiotherapy and physical therapy<sup>1</sup> are descriptors of the profession solely practiced by physiotherapists. The use of the descriptor of the profession to define modalities performed by other professions, both regulated and unregulated, is a source of confusion for the public and payors of these services. We believe that the descriptors associated with the profession of physiotherapy, and all professions under the RHPA, should be protected to ensure public safety and clarity and transparency regarding services delivered.

## BACKGROUND

Under the Regulated Health Professions Act (RHPA) and the Physiotherapy Act use of the title Physiotherapist or Physical Therapist is given to those who have completed the required education and are registered under the College of Physiotherapists of Ontario.

The descriptors of the profession, physiotherapy/physical therapy, are not currently protected by law in the province of Ontario.

With no effective protection of the descriptors, “physiotherapy” or “physical therapy”, use of the term by non-physiotherapists has proliferated from the beginning of the profession in the province and increased over time as more professions adopt the terms to build market share on the reputation of the profession. In public polling in Ontario the large majority of respondents assume that only a physiotherapist can provide physiotherapy and assume as well that the provider they receive care from is a physiotherapist. In fact, some clinics in Ontario advertise that they provide physiotherapy, but have no physiotherapists on staff.

Members of the public should reasonably assume that a person who is offering “physiotherapy” is a physiotherapist or support personnel under the direction of a physiotherapist. In making that assumption and not taking the step to ensure that you are receiving care from a registered physiotherapist, you are not guaranteed that you are receiving physiotherapy from a physiotherapist. This is a substantial loophole in the RHPA of which advantage is being taken to the detriment of those whom the RHPA was designed to protect.

Elsewhere in Canada (Yukon, Alberta, New Brunswick, Nova Scotia, Prince Edward Island and Newfoundland/Labrador), professional descriptors have been protected in the statutes regulating the profession.

The Ontario Physiotherapy Association has lobbied for the protection of the terms “physiotherapy” and “physical therapy” with each opportunity as the RHPA was reviewed at the five year mark and again with the recent review. Despite this no changes have been recommended by Health Professions Regulatory Advisory Council (HPRAC) to the Minister of Health and Long Term Care.

Physiotherapists are not alone in their concern regarding professional descriptors. Virtually all RHPA professions support statutory protection for their respective professional descriptors. The descriptors for Psychology and Psychological are protected under the RHPA and the Psychology Act in Ontario due to concerns for public safety in the use of these profession descriptors by non- psychologists. The Ontario Physiotherapy Association supports the protection of all professional descriptors for professions regulated under the RHPA.

In 1999 and 2000, the Canadian Alliance of Physiotherapy Regulators (the Alliance) pursued and received Official Mark <sup>2</sup>status for the terms physiotherapist, physical therapist, physiotherapy and physical therapy and the French equivalents (and the titles associated with the profession in both languages) under the (federal) Trademarks Act.

The Ontario Physiotherapy Association supports the application of the Official Mark and the protection of the professional descriptor, physiotherapy, for the sole use by those with the legal right to the title physiotherapist.

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<sup>1</sup> Physiotherapy and related terms are official mark held by the Canadian Alliance of Physiotherapy Regulators.

<sup>2</sup> Official marks are words that have been registered with the Canadian Intellectual Property Office through the federal Trade-marks Act. The Canadian Alliance of Physiotherapy Regulators (The Alliance), has the authority for the use of official marks throughout Canada for the profession that include practice words (e.g. physiotherapy and physical therapy) and title words (e.g. physical therapist, physiotherapist and PT). The Alliance delegates authority for the use of these words to individually registered/licensed physiotherapists through their provincial/territorial physiotherapy regulators, and to related physiotherapy organizations such as the Canadian Physiotherapy Association, and accredited physiotherapy educational programs.