

U.S. Senate Committee on Appropriations
Subcommittee on Labor, Health and Human Services, Education, and Related Agencies
Fiscal Year 2026 Appropriations
Outside Testimony

Submitted by: James Specker for the American Massage Therapy Association

Agency addressed: National Center for Complementary and Integrative Health at NIH

The American Massage Therapy Association (AMTA) is pleased to submit a statement for the record to express our appreciation for the Committee's efforts in recent years to ensure a stable source of funding for the National Institutes of Health (NIH), particularly the National Center for Complementary and Integrative Health (NCCIH) and its efforts to support and strengthen non-opioid pain management therapies, including massage therapy. We also want to express our strong opposition to the Administration's recent budget proposal to eliminate the NCCIH.

Founded in 1943, the American Massage Therapy Association (AMTA) represents more than 106,000 members nationwide and is mission-driven to advance massage therapy's art, science, and practice. AMTA advocates for fair and consistent massage therapy licensing in all 50 states and U.S. territories, educates the public on its health benefits, and supports research to expand scientific understanding in the field. Massage therapists are licensed in 46 states and the District of Columbia.

We are deeply concerned about any proposal that would eliminate the NCCIH, as it would derail virtually all the noteworthy progress to date on the range of key issues currently within NCCIH's jurisdiction, including the problem of pain. We know that chronic pain in the US is growing at a faster rate than diabetes, depression, and hypertension. Eliminating the NIH center that is most responsible for research into non-opioid and non-pharmacological treatments for the condition that is the #1 reason for patients to seek medical care – pain -- flies in the face of the fundamental tenets of "Make America Healthy Again".

We express grave concern regarding any proposal to eliminate the NCCIH, as doing so would significantly undermine the substantial advancements made in critical areas under its purview, particularly in pain research. Chronic pain, in the US, is growing at a faster rate than diabetes, depression, or hypertension, and represents one of the leading causes of medical consultations. The potential dissolution of the NIH center most directly responsible for investigating non-opioid and non-pharmacological treatment modalities would constitute a significant setback in national

public health strategy, contradicting the core objectives of initiatives such as “Make America Healthy Again.”

As the primary federal entity dedicated to the scientific exploration of complementary and integrative health interventions, NCCIH plays a pivotal role in evaluating the safety, efficacy, and practical utility of treatments such as massage therapy. Its mission is to empower individuals to make informed decisions about healthcare options in mind-body practices, natural products, and pain management. Recognizing the significant societal burden of untreated pain—and its association with increased risk of opioid misuse—Congress established the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services Pain Management Best Practices Inter-Agency Task Force. In its 2019 final report, the Task Force highlighted integrative and complementary therapies, including massage therapy, as essential components of effective, patient-centered pain care.

[Read the 2019 Final Report](#)

Massage therapy is a well-established and evidence-supported integrative therapy that is effective for a wide variety of pain-related conditions:

- Massage therapy is a recognized supplemental benefit in Medicare Advantage plans,
- Massage is a covered benefit for our nation’s veterans and active-duty military personnel.
- An ever-growing body of research supports massage for both acute and chronic pain, including low back pain, neck and shoulder pain, and side effects associated with certain cancers, as well as HIV/AIDS and fibromyalgia,
- Massage has been used in the NICU setting as an effective treatment for newborns born to mothers with substance abuse.
- Major provider associations, including the American College of Physicians and The Joint Commission support massage therapy.
- Massage is utilized in acute care settings in hospitals and other institutions, such as the Mayo Clinic, M.D. Anderson Cancer Center, Duke Integrative Medicine, the Cleveland Clinic, and Memorial Sloan Kettering Cancer Center.
- Some of the most recent innovative research supports the efficacy of massage for pregnant women who have previously experienced one or more still births, as well as pain associated with cystic fibrosis, and patients who have experienced war and trauma.

We note that AMTA also supports massage research through our research partner, the Massage Therapy Foundation (MTF). To date, MTF has provided 57 grants totaling \$2M and 140 Community Service awards to underfunded areas where massage therapy is typically not accessible.

While the MTF has demonstrated a longstanding commitment to advancing the field of massage therapy through evidence-based initiatives, seed funding alone is insufficient to sustain the momentum required for continued progress. The partnership and active engagement of the NCCIH remain essential to achieving these goals. Substantial evidence supports the effectiveness of massage therapy; however, further research is needed to optimize its application across

diverse populations, from neonates to older adults. Equally important is the need to deepen our understanding of the biological mechanisms underlying pain and the factors contributing to its varied manifestations among individuals.

To this end, it is imperative to maintain a robust, federally supported research infrastructure at NCCIH that is specifically tasked with investigating and advancing massage therapy within the broader context of integrative pain management. Continued education for healthcare providers on the clinical value of massage and related therapies is also critical. Significant strides have been made in identifying practical, non-pharmacologic approaches to pain management, including massage therapy, and it is vital that we not undermine this progress.

We are grateful for the Committee's continued interest in and support of massage therapy as a viable strategy in pain management. We respectfully urge you to reject any proposal that would eliminate the NCCIH or impair its capacity through severe budget reductions, compromising its mission and advancing integrative health research.

Thank you for the opportunity to submit this statement.