



# Aotearoa New Zealand Physiotherapy Code of Ethics and Professional Conduct

## Introduction

The purpose of the Aotearoa New Zealand Physiotherapy Code of Ethics and Professional Conduct is to provide a set of guidelines for the professional behaviour expected of physiotherapists in Aotearoa New Zealand. This code is based on longstanding ethical values and professional principles of:

- **Respect and dignity:** to acknowledge, appreciate and value the worth of an individual or group.
- **Respect for autonomy:** to respect a patient's/client's freedom to decide for him or herself; this includes informed consent.
- **Beneficence:** to do good or to provide benefit to patients/clients.
- **Non-maleficence:** to not cause harm to patients/clients.
- **Justice:** to treat people fairly and to allocate resources fairly between patients/clients.
- **Responsibility:** to be reliable and dependable.
- **Trustworthiness and integrity:** to be honest and able to be trusted.
- **Citizenship:** the standard of an individual physiotherapist's behaviour as a member of the professional group.

## 10 Principles of the Code

1. Physiotherapists respect patients/clients and their whanau and families.
2. Physiotherapists act to promote the health and wellbeing of the patient/client, while acknowledging, respecting and facilitating patient/client autonomy.
3. Physiotherapists respect confidentiality, privacy and security of patient/client information.
4. Physiotherapists treat people fairly.
5. Physiotherapists practise in a safe, competent and accountable manner.
6. Physiotherapists act with integrity in all professional activities.
7. Physiotherapists strive for excellence in the practice of physiotherapy.
8. Physiotherapists communicate effectively and cooperate with colleagues, other health professionals and agencies, for the benefit of their patients/clients and the wider community.
9. Physiotherapists take responsibility to maintain their own health and wellbeing.
10. Physiotherapists accept responsibility for upholding the integrity of the profession.





## 1. Physiotherapists respect patients/clients and their whanau and families.

The relationship between physiotherapist and their patient/client is one of trust, and as such **physiotherapists must:**

- 1.1 respect the dignity, privacy, bodily integrity, and mental wellbeing of patients/clients.
- 1.2 behave in a respectful manner towards their patients/clients as well as their whanau and family
- 1.3 practise with due care and respect for an individual patient's/client's culture, needs, values, worldviews and beliefs, including the needs, values and beliefs of Maori.
- 1.4 not impose their own values and beliefs on patients/clients or their whanau and families.

## 2. Physiotherapists act to promote the health and wellbeing of the patient/client, while acknowledging, respecting and facilitating patient/client autonomy.

**Physiotherapists must:**

- 2.1 consider the health and wellbeing of the patient/client to be their first priority.
- 2.2 respect the autonomy and freedom of choice of the patient/client.
- 2.3 establish respectful partnerships with patients/clients that acknowledge patient/client needs and goals.
- 2.4 involve the patient/client in the creation of care plans, and revisit patient/client goals and plans on a regular basis.
- 2.5 clearly inform patients/clients of the purpose and nature of physiotherapy intervention to enable all patients/clients to make an informed choice.
- 2.6 seek patient/client consent prior to providing physiotherapy services, ensuring that patient/client consent is freely given and appropriately documented.

- 2.7 act in accordance with the law where the patient/client has compromised decision making capacity, or is unable to provide consent.
- 2.8 seek patient/client consent if a physiotherapy student (or other person) will be present during the provision of physiotherapy services or providing aspects of care.
- 2.9 not exploit any patient/client whether physically, sexually, emotionally, or financially. Sexual contact of any kind with patients/clients is unacceptable.
- 2.10 establish and maintain appropriate professional boundaries with patients/clients and their whanau and families.
- 2.11 make provision for continuity of care when planning to be absent from their place of practice.

**Physiotherapists should:**

- 2.12 consider and where practicable attend to the health needs of the community within which they practise.
- 2.13 be alert to the needs and special concerns of vulnerable groups. Where patients/clients or others are subject to abuse physiotherapists should consider their legal and ethical obligations.

## 3. Physiotherapists respect confidentiality, privacy and security of patient/client information.

**Physiotherapists must:**

- 3.1 hold all patient/client information in confidence (including when the patient/client has ended treatment).
- 3.2 not disclose identifiable health information about a patient/client without the patient's/client's permission, unless disclosure is required or permitted by law.
- 3.3 ensure that all patient/client records and images are stored securely.
- 3.4 not access patient/client information unless the physiotherapist is involved in that patient's/client's care or has specific permission to do so from the patient/client or the patient's/client's legal guardian.

## 4. Physiotherapists treat people fairly.

### Physiotherapists must:

- 4.1 not discriminate or deny access to physiotherapy services on the basis of a person's race, gender, age, religion, ethnicity, disability, sexual orientation, political affiliation, economic, social or health status or any other legally prohibited grounds of discrimination.
- 4.2 use a coherent, robust and transparent rationale when allocating resources.
- 4.3 be responsible stewards of health care resources.

### Physiotherapists should:

- 4.4 advise managers or funders and patients/clients and their whanau and families when resources are insufficient to allow safe and adequate care.
- 4.5 feel free to refuse to treat a patient/client if they have good reasons for doing so, and should inform the patient/client of alternative options of care, and where appropriate to refer to another practitioner.
- 4.6 advocate to reduce health disparities and inequalities, and improve access to physiotherapy services.

## 5. Physiotherapists practise in a safe, competent and accountable manner.

### Physiotherapists must:

- 5.1 base physiotherapy interventions on the best available evidence.
- 5.2 make sound professional judgements within their scope of practice and level of expertise and be accountable for their professional activities.
- 5.3 provide physiotherapy services that are clinically justifiable.
- 5.4 practise according to documented competencies and standards and maintain these.
- 5.5 incorporate safety and risk management strategies within physiotherapy practice to ensure the safety of patients/clients and staff.
- 5.6 provide clear and appropriate direction and support for less experienced colleagues and support staff.

- 5.7 keep contemporaneous, accurate and legible records of patient/client treatment and progress.
- 5.8 have a full understanding of and comply with the laws and regulations that govern and impact on the practice of physiotherapy in Aotearoa New Zealand.

## 6. Physiotherapists act with integrity in all professional activities.

### Physiotherapists must:

- 6.1 provide truthful, accurate and relevant information and must not knowingly make misleading representations to patients/clients and those legally entitled or authorised to receive information.
- 6.2 fully disclose any interests, including financial interests, held in products and services recommended to their patients/clients.
- 6.3 act with honesty and integrity in all professional activities (including when interacting with: funders, employers, employees, insurers).
- 6.4 not accept gifts or other considerations from industry or others that may influence or give the appearance of influencing the physiotherapist's professional judgement.
- 6.5 be alert to potential conflicts of interest and take appropriate steps to declare and minimise conflicts of interest.
- 6.6 ensure that financial remuneration is commensurate with the work performed.

## 7. Physiotherapists strive for excellence in the practice of physiotherapy.

### Physiotherapists must:

- 7.1 commit to ongoing learning and the maintenance and development of clinical and professional skills.
- 7.2 engage in peer review activities.
- 7.3 ensure research in which they are involved has approval from an appropriately accredited research ethics committee where required.

- 7.4 declare to research participants and proposed publishers where research funding has been received from industry or any other person or organisation.
- 7.5 ensure that financial remuneration for participating as a research investigator is commensurate with the work performed.

**Physiotherapists should:**

- 7.6 subject the development of innovative therapies to a research protocol to ensure patient/client safety and a sound evidence base for treatments.

**8. Physiotherapists communicate effectively and cooperate with colleagues, other health professionals and agencies, for the benefit of their patients/clients and the wider community.**

**Physiotherapists must:**

- 8.1 engage in effective communication and cooperate with colleagues, other health professionals and agencies to achieve optimal outcomes for the patient/client.
- 8.2 refer patients/clients in a timely fashion when their needs fall outside the physiotherapist's scope of practice or skill level.
- 8.3 collaborate with other service providers for the benefit of the patient/client, keeping referring colleagues informed of the outcomes of assessment and treatment.
- 8.4 behave respectfully in communication to and about colleagues or other health professionals.

**9. Physiotherapists take responsibility to maintain their own health and wellbeing.**

**Physiotherapists must:**

- 9.1 refrain from practising while impaired by alcohol or drugs, or when physical, mental or emotional ill health may impair performance.

**Physiotherapists should:**

- 9.2 endeavour to recognise when fatigue, stress, physical or mental illness or any other condition may reduce their clinical or other skills and seek and comply with professional advice.
- 9.3 engage in activities that encourage self awareness and reflective practice and seek appropriate support when working in clinical areas where suffering, grief and loss are commonplace.

**10. Physiotherapists accept responsibility for upholding the integrity of the profession**

**Physiotherapists must:**

- 10.1 bring unsafe or unethical behaviour by another physiotherapist or other health professional to the attention of the appropriate authority wherever legally required.
- 10.2 take particular care to uphold the values within this code when using electronic communication and social networking sites.
- 10.3 not undermine patient/client safety, or the quality and professional standing of physiotherapy when teaching physiotherapy skills to others.
- 10.4 when engaged in advertising or promotion:
  - Claim only those qualifications to which they are entitled and ensure that any perceived or actual misinterpretations about qualifications are avoided and corrected.
  - Use advertising methods and/or material which do not bring the profession into disrepute.
  - Not engage in any conduct that is misleading as to the nature, characteristics and/or suitability of any product and/or service.

**Physiotherapists should:**

- 10.5 willingly engage in teaching physiotherapy practice to physiotherapy students and less experienced colleagues.
- 10.6 avoid treating close family members.



## Relationships with other codes and legislation

Under section 118 of the Health Practitioners Competence Assurance Act 2003 (HPCA Act), the Physiotherapy Board is responsible for setting standards of clinical competence, cultural competence and ethical conduct for physiotherapists. This code has been developed to be the foundation document for those standards.

This Code should be read in conjunction with relevant legislation in Aotearoa New Zealand and with policies, procedures, competencies and standards that regulate professional practice. Relevant law has been identified throughout this Code. It is important that all physiotherapists have a full understanding of and comply with the laws and regulations that govern the practice of physiotherapy in Aotearoa New Zealand.

## Terminology

### **Physiotherapists must:**

The term 'must' is used where the statement sets a minimum standard that all physiotherapists are obliged to achieve.

### **Physiotherapists should:**

The term 'should' indicates an aspirational standard that the physiotherapy profession aims to promote. Here the physiotherapist is expected to comply, but may use their discretion.

## Te Tiriti o Waitangi/The Treaty of Waitangi

The Code acknowledges Te Tiriti o Waitangi/The Treaty of Waitangi as the founding document of Aotearoa New Zealand, and recognises and respects the specific importance of health services for Maori as the indigenous people of Aotearoa New Zealand.

An electronic version of the Code and the Code with commentary can be downloaded from the Board's website [www.physioboard.org.nz](http://www.physioboard.org.nz)



The principles expressed in this document reflect the values considered fundamental to the practice of physiotherapy in Aotearoa New Zealand. The aim of the Code is to cover areas of ethical concern most commonly experienced by physiotherapists. It is not intended to address all ethical concerns, nor provide solutions to all ethical problems. Physiotherapists are expected to exercise their ethical judgement and balance ethical values.

The Code acknowledges the many areas of clinical work and other work environments of physiotherapists in Aotearoa New Zealand including: hospitals or rest homes, private practice, community based settings, educational facilities, industry, tertiary educational institutions, sports environment, or military.

The Code also recognises that physiotherapists may act in a role of first contact practitioner or in response to referrals from others.

OCTOBER 2011

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