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# Physiotherapy – Safe Use of Western Acupuncture and Dry Needling Policy

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## 1. Purpose

Physiotherapists in WA Country Health Service (WACHS) may practice acupuncture under either of the following paradigms: Western Acupuncture or Dry Needling, in accordance with the requirements of this policy.

Western Acupuncture and Dry Needling are therapeutic techniques that may be included within the current scope of physiotherapy practice that involve skin penetration for the treatment of pain and other symptoms of musculoskeletal disorders, or to improve functional health status. The use of these techniques within the context of physiotherapy is to be based on clinical reasoning as part of an overall management approach

With the introduction of the [Health Practitioner Regulation National Law \(WA\) Act 2010](#) a 'physiotherapist' is defined as a person who resides in this state and is registered under the Health Practitioner Regulation National Law (Western Australia) in the physiotherapy profession.

The Australian Society of Acupuncture Physiotherapists (ASAP) [Guidelines for Safe Acupuncture and Dry Needling Practice](#) (2018) outlines a safe practice guide for physiotherapists practicing Western acupuncture or dry needling in Australia, and includes the minimum standards set by the International Acupuncture Association of Physical Therapists (IAAPT). It is suggested that these guidelines be read in conjunction with this policy and used as a reference for information on contraindications and precautions, management of adverse reactions and hygiene requirements specific to acupuncture.

The practice of Traditional or East Asian Medicine Acupuncture is not supported within WACHS.

## 2. Policy

### 2.1 Scope of Practice and Training Standards

Physiotherapists are to confine their use of acupuncture to treatment of conditions within the scope of practice for which they have training and experience. Physiotherapists are to practice Western acupuncture and dry needling with respect to the level of training they have received. This is particularly pertinent for any needling in the trunk, thorax or cervical regions.

In order to practice dry needling and Western acupuncture within WA Country Health Service (WACHS), it is a requirement that physiotherapists undertake as a minimum, a two day course as a basic introduction as per the [Guidelines for Safe Acupuncture and Dry Needling Practice](#) (2018) and recommendations made by the Acupuncture and Dry Needling Group of the Australian Physiotherapy Association (APA). Such courses must have at least 12 hours of practical face to face training as this is considered a minimum for sufficient training, in light of the inherent risk associated with skin penetration, especially if needling in the neck and thorax regions is taught at an introductory level. Any training should include documented competency based assessment.

In addition to the minimum introductory training, physiotherapists are required to complete a minimum eight (8) hours of continuing professional development in acupuncture or dry needling every two (2) years to remain competent in the field of practice. It is recommended that a portion of CPD should be practical training. It is the responsibility of the employee to maintain their competency by attending the relevant training. Written evidence of this compliance must be provided to their line manager to demonstrate that this requirement has been met to enable the physiotherapist to undertake acupuncture as a treatment option.

## 2.2 Consent for Treatment

Physiotherapists must adhere to the [WA Health Consent to Treatment Policy](#). An example of verbal and written information that can be provided to patients to assist in the consent process is provided in [Appendix A](#). Documentation must be completed in the medical record regarding warnings given and informed consent.

If seeking written consent, physiotherapists should use the WACHS Consent forms:

- [MR30A Patient Consent to Treatment or Investigation – Adult or Mature Minor](#)
- [MR30B Consent for a Minor Requiring Parenteral-Guardian Approval for Treatment or Investigation](#)
- [MR30C Adults Without the Capacity to Consent to Treatment or Investigation](#)

## 2.3 Infection Control

Physiotherapists undertaking dry needling or acupuncture must adhere to the [WACHS Infection Prevention and Control Policy](#).

Specific considerations in the provision of acupuncture and dry needling include:

- using disposable, single use needles
- ensuring hands and nails are clean prior to giving treatment and abiding by hand washing guidelines described in the [WACHS Hand Hygiene Policy](#)
- covering cuts, abrasions or lesions on a therapist's skin with a water-resistant occlusive dressing or disposable gloves
- cleaning the patient's skin in the area to be needled, if the patient does not present with clean skin, with soap and water or by using isopropyl alcohol skin wipes

It is the responsibility of any person who performs skin penetration procedures to ensure that they are familiar with the principles of infection control and safe working procedures.

## 2.4 Occupational Health and Safety

In accordance with the [WACHS Infection Prevention and Control Policy](#) and Australian Standard [AS23907:2023](#):

- All discarded needles must be disposed of in a clearly labelled, puncture resistant sharps container.
- Single use sharps containers must never be emptied, cleaned or reused.
- All sharps are to be placed in an appropriate container when not in use.

Care must be taken to avoid contact with a patient's blood. Should bleeding occur, a dry cotton wool ball is to be used to absorb it and disposed of into an appropriate container according to the WA Communicable Disease Control Directorate Guideline [Management of Occupational Exposure to Blood and Body Fluids in Healthcare Settings](#).

## 2.5 Adverse Events

In the event of an adverse event, physiotherapists must abide by the [WA Health Clinical Incident Management Policy](#).

Reporting of serious adverse events associated with acupuncture or dry needling should be made immediately as applicable to the relevant professional insurer. Local WACHS sites may have further requirements regarding notification of adverse events.

## 2.6 Access to Practice

The use of Western Acupuncture and Dry Needling by WACHS physiotherapists should be part of an overall management approach, and as an adjunct to other physiotherapy techniques. Local level decision making is necessary, and physiotherapists should consult with their senior physiotherapist or line manager with regard to the site-specific practice of these techniques.

## 3. Roles and Responsibilities

All **WACHS physiotherapists** are required to comply with this policy and ensure they practice safely, competently and within their area of demonstrated expertise.

It is the responsibility of individual physiotherapists to adhere to the regulatory requirements for the education and use of procedures involving skin penetration in the jurisdiction(s) in which they practice.

**All staff** are required to comply with the directions in WACHS policies and procedures as per their roles and responsibilities. Guidelines are the recommended course of action for WACHS and staff are expected to use this information to guide practice. If staff are unsure which policies procedures and guidelines apply to their role or scope of practice, and/or are unsure of the application of directions they should consult their manager in the first instance.

## 4. Monitoring and Evaluation

The WACHS Allied Health Leadership and Governance Team is to undertake a review of this policy every five (5) years, or earlier if required, to ensure it continues to align with established guideline updates.

## 5. References

Australian Society of Acupuncture Physiotherapists. [Guidelines for Safe Acupuncture and Dry Needling Practice](#). 2018 June [Accessed 28 August 2025].

Government of Western Australia, Department of Health [Code of Practice for Skin Penetration Procedures](#) 1998 [Internet]. January 2017 [Accessed 4 September 2025].

National Health and Medical Research Council. [Australian Guidelines for the Prevention and Control of Infection in Healthcare](#) [Internet]. 2024 [Accessed 20 October 2025].

## 6. Definitions

Term	Definition
<b>Western Acupuncture</b>	Western acupuncture utilises meridian points but applies it to western reasoning with particular consideration to neurophysiology and anatomy. It does not utilise any traditional Chinese or East Asian Medicine (EAM) assessment methods or paradigms. Utilisation within the context of physiotherapy is to be based on clinical reasoning as part of an overall management approach.
<b>Dry Needling</b>	Needling to altered or dysfunctional tissues in order to improve or restore function. This may include (but is not limited to) needling of myofascial trigger points, periosteum and soft tissues. Utilisation within the context of physiotherapy is to be based on clinical reasoning as part of an overall management approach.
<b>Traditional Acupuncture</b>	Traditional Acupuncture utilises meridian or extra points based on an East Asian Medicine (EAM) approach which includes diagnosis and clinical reasoning using various EAM assessment methods and theoretical constructs.

## 7. Document Summary

<b>Coverage</b>	WACHS wide
<b>Audience</b>	All physiotherapists working in Western Australian Country Health Service (WACHS) health services.
<b>Records Management</b>	Clinical: <a href="#">Health Record Management Policy</a>
<b>Related Legislation</b>	Health Services Act 2016 (WA)
<b>Related Mandatory Policies / Frameworks</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• MP 0175/22 <a href="#">Consent to Treatment Policy</a></li> <li>• MP 0122/19 <a href="#">Clinical Incident Management Policy</a></li> <li>• MP 0127/20 <a href="#">Discipline Policy</a></li> <li>• <a href="#">Clinical Governance Safety and Quality Policy Framework</a></li> </ul>
<b>Related WACHS Policy Documents</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <a href="#">Infection Prevention and Control Policy</a></li> <li>• <a href="#">Hand Hygiene Policy</a></li> <li>• <a href="#">Chaperone Policy</a></li> <li>• <a href="#">Consent to Treatment Policy</a></li> </ul>
<b>Other Related Documents</b>	<a href="#">Nil</a>
<b>Related Forms</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <a href="#">MR30A Patient Consent to Treatment or Investigation – Adult or Mature Minor</a></li> <li>• <a href="#">MR30B Consent for a Minor Requiring Parenteral-Guardian Approval for Treatment or Investigation</a></li> <li>• <a href="#">MR30C Adults without the Capacity to Consent to Treatment or Investigation</a></li> </ul>
<b>Related Training</b>	Available from <a href="#">MyLearning</a> : <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Hand Hygiene Declaration (CICHH EL2)</li> <li>• Basics of Infection Prevention and Control Orientation Module (CICB EL2)</li> </ul>
<b>Aboriginal Health Impact Statement Declaration (ISD)</b>	ISD Record ID: 5197
<b><a href="#">National Safety and Quality Health Service (NSQHS) Standards</a></b>	1.3, 1.7, 1.20, 1.23, 2.4, 3.8, 5.1
<b><a href="#">Aged Care Quality Standards</a></b>	Nil
<b><a href="#">Chief Psychiatrist's Standards for Clinical Care</a></b>	Nil
<b>Other Standards (please specify and include link)</b>	Nil

## 8. Document Control

Version	Published date	Current from	Summary of changes
6.00	4 February 2026	4 February 2026	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Terminology and procedural updates to reflect currency of best practice in acupuncture and dry needling</li> <li>Hyperlinks updated to current policies and frameworks</li> </ul>

## 9. Approval

<b>Policy Owner</b>	Chief Operating Officer
<b>Co-approver</b>	Executive Director Clinical Excellence
<b>Contact</b>	Emma Lanigan, Professional Lead Physiotherapy
<b>Business Unit</b>	Allied Health Program
<b>EDRMS #</b>	ED-CO-14-2887
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**This document can be made available in alternative formats on request.**

## Appendix A: Patient Explanation

Please read this information carefully, and ask your therapist if there is anything that you do not understand.

### What is Western acupuncture/dry needling?

Western acupuncture and dry needling are forms of therapy in which very fine needles are inserted into specific points on the body.

### Is acupuncture safe?

Western acupuncture is generally very safe. Serious side effects are rare – less than one per 10,000 treatments. Sterile, single use, disposable needles are to be used.

### Does acupuncture have side effects?

Most risks are minor. These may include (but are not limited to):

- alteration in energy levels. Some people may experience either high levels of energy or
- may feel fatigued/drowsy after treatment in which case, you are advised not to drive
- bruising or minor bleeding
- mild discomfort or rarely pain, particularly in the first treatment or two
- after treatment, temporary aggravation of the existing symptoms may occur or
- soreness for a couple of days. This is usually a sign that healing has begun. Please
- contact your physiotherapist if you are concerned
- nausea
- fainting can occur, particularly after the first treatment

If you have any adverse reactions to acupuncture/dry needling, please notify your physiotherapist immediately.

If acupuncture is provided to your trunk there is a very rare possibility of a pneumothorax (collapsed lung). If you do experience increasing shortness of breath following acupuncture / dry needling over the shoulders or trunk, please contact your physiotherapist directly or attend the nearest hospital emergency department.

In addition, if there are particular risks that apply in your case, your physiotherapist will discuss these with you.

### Is there anything your physiotherapist should know before treatment commences?

It is important to let your physiotherapist know if you:

- have a heart condition, pacemaker or any other electrical implants
- have a bleeding disorder, or history of blood clots, thrombosis or stroke
- have diabetes or epilepsy
- are currently taking medication including anti-coagulants
- have a predisposition for infection or are undergoing chemotherapy, radiotherapy or any other treatments that increase the risk of infection
- are pregnant.