



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

## 1. Background

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 involve skin penetration that may be included within the current scope of physiotherapy practice. Utilisation within the context of physiotherapy is to be based on clinical reasoning as part of an overall management approach.

Physiotherapists may utilise techniques involving skin penetration for the treatment of pain and other symptoms of musculoskeletal disorders, or as a measure to improve functional health status.

With the introduction of the [Health Practitioner Regulation National Law \(WA\) Act 2010](#) a 'physiotherapist' defines a person who is resident 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) Guideline - '[Guidelines for Safe Acupuncture and Dry Needling Practice \(2018\)](#)' - is a safe practice guide for physiotherapists practicing Western acupuncture or dry needling in Australia. This guideline outlines the including 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.

## 2. Policy Statement

### 2.1 Scope of Practice

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. The practice of needling (whether dry needling or acupuncture) is recognised as falling within the scope of physiotherapy practice.

For dry needling and Western acupuncture, it is a WA Country Health Service (WACHS) 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).

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.

The practice of 'Traditional Acupuncture' is not supported within WACHS.

### 2.2 Consent for Treatment

Physiotherapists must adhere to the [WA Health Consent to Treatment Policy](#). [Appendix 1](#) of this policy provides an example of verbal and written information that can be provided to patients to assist in the consent process. Documentation is to 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

WACHS supports safe infection control practices, safe environment through health surveillance, safety risk assessments, immunisation and the effective prevention and control of infection. 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:

- Disposable, single use needles are to be used.
- Physiotherapists must ensure that hands and nails are clean prior to giving treatment, abiding by organisational hand washing guidelines as part of the [WACHS Hand Hygiene Policy](#).
- Cuts, abrasions or lesions on the skin of the therapist are a possible source of pathogens and are to be covered by a water resistant occlusive dressing or disposable gloves worn.
- The patient's skin in the area to be needled must be clean. If the patient does not present with clean skin, the area to be needled may be cleaned with soap and water, or by using isopropyl alcohol skin wipes.
- Skin sterilisation is recommended for patients who have a deficiency in their immune system.

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

All discarded needles must be disposed of in a clearly labelled; puncture resistant sharps container that conforms to Australian Standard AS 4031, 'Non reusable containers for the collection of sharp medical items used in health care areas'.

The emptying, cleaning and disinfection of reusable sharps containers must be in accordance with AS/NZS 4478. 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 Health Management of Occupational Exposure to Blood and Body Fluids in the Healthcare Setting](#).

## 2.5 Adverse Events

In the event of an adverse event, physiotherapists must abide by the [WA Health Clinical Incident Management Policy \(2015\)](#).

## 2.6 Access to Practice

It is recommended that the utilisation of Western acupuncture and dry needling as a treatment modality by physiotherapists within WACHS be used as part of an overall management approach and as such, as an adjunct to other physiotherapy techniques. It is to involve local decision-making, and physiotherapists are to consult with their senior physiotherapist or line manager with regards to the site specific practice of acupuncture and dry needling as a treatment modality.

## 3. Definitions

<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.

## 4. Roles and Responsibilities

All WACHS physiotherapists are required to comply with this policy and ensure they operate in accordance with the principles and aims of the policy.

Physiotherapists have strong anatomical and biomedical knowledge and are well placed to safely and effectively practice skin penetration procedures.

Physiotherapists who utilise practices involving skin penetration are to undertake appropriate training. They are to limit the use of these practices to the management of generally accepted physical disorders within their scope of practice.

Physiotherapists who utilise practices involving skin penetration are expected to practice safely, competently and within their area of demonstrated expertise.

Physiotherapists must comply with national best practice guidelines for infection control.

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.

## 5. Compliance

This policy applies to all WACHS Physiotherapists undertaking the treatment of Western Acupuncture and Dry Needling in clinical practice.

Failure to comply with this policy may constitute a breach of the WA Health Code of Conduct (Code). The Code is part of the [Integrity Policy Framework](#) issued pursuant to section 26 of the [Health Services Act 2016](#) (WA) and is binding on all WACHS staff which for this purpose includes trainees, students, volunteers, researchers, contractors for service (including all visiting health professionals and agency staff) and persons delivering training or education within WACHS.

WACHS staff are reminded that compliance with all policies is mandatory.

## 6. Records Management

All WACHS clinical records must be managed in accordance with [Health Record Management Policy](#).

## 7. 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.

## 8. Standards

[National Safety and Quality Healthcare Standards](#) (Second edition 2017) 1.1, 1.3, 1.7, 1.20, 1.23, 2.4, 3.1, 3.8, 3.9, 5.1

## 9. Legislation

[Health Practitioner Regulation National Law \(WA\) Act 2010](#)

## 10. References

1. Government of Western Australia, Department of Health [Code of Practice for Skin Penetration Procedures](#) 1998 [Internet]. January 2017 [Accessed 15 June 2020].
2. Australian Society of Acupuncture Physiotherapists. [Guidelines for Safe Acupuncture and Dry Needling Practice](#) [Internet]. 2018 June [Accessed 15 June 2020].
3. Fiona Stanley Hospital [Physiotherapists' Safe Use of Western Acupuncture and Dry Needling](#) [Intranet]. 2014 August [Accessed 15 June 2020].
4. Fiona Stanley Hospital. Fiona Stanley Hospital [Physiotherapists' Practising Western Acupuncture and Dry Needling](#) [Intranet] 2014 August [Accessed 15 June 2020].
5. Government of Western Australia, Department of Health [Code of Conduct MP 0124/19](#) [Internet]. 2020 February [Accessed 15 June 2020].
6. National Health and Medical Research Council. [Australian Guidelines for the Prevention and Control of Infection in Healthcare](#) [Internet]. 2019 [Accessed 15 June 2020].

## 11. Related 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](#)

## 12. Related Policy Documents

WACHS [Infection Prevention and Control Policy](#)  
WACHS [Hand Hygiene Policy](#)  
WACHS [Chaperone Policy](#)

## 13. Related WA Health Policies

[WA Health Consent to Treatment Policy](#)  
[WA Health Clinical and Related Waste Management Policy](#)  
[WA Health Management of Occupational Exposure to Blood and Body Fluids in the Healthcare Setting](#)  
[WA Health Clinical Incident Management Policy \(2019\)](#)  
[WA Health Discipline Policy](#)

## 14. WA Health Policy Framework

[Clinical Governance Safety and Quality Policy Framework](#)

**This document can be made available in alternative formats  
on request for a person with a disability**

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## Appendix 1: 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.