



FHT



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First Minister Arlene Foster
Parliament Buildings
Ballymiscaw
Stormont
Belfast BT4 3XX

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Dear First Minister

First and foremost, I hope this letter finds you and your colleagues well.

I am the president of the Federation of Holistic Therapists (FHT), the leading professional association for complementary, holistic beauty and sports therapists in the UK. We represent c.16,000 members a year, a vast number of whom are also listed on our Accredited Register of complementary therapists, which is independently approved by the [Professional Standards Authority](#) as part of a Government-backed programme to help care commissioners and the public choose a non-statutory regulated health practitioner with confidence.

Today, I am writing to ask the Government of Northern Ireland to recognise professional therapists, including FHT members, as essential workers, so that they can continue to support people who have physical or mental health conditions when there are national restrictions in place.

While I of course appreciate that restrictions are introduced to help tackle the spread of coronavirus, I am not aware of any data or reports to suggest that businesses offering close contact services – and therapeutic services, in particular – are contributing to a rise in cases, and that restricting our members' ability to practice will have a significant impact on their clients' health, who in turn may be forced to draw on healthcare resources that are already under significant strain.

The results of a recent FHT Member Survey (UK-wide, October 2020) clearly shows a significant drop in the number of clients FHT members have been able to support on a regular basis as a direct result of COVID-19 and Government measures put in place to try and stop the virus from spreading.

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To give you an example:

- Clients seeking support for **long-term conditions** – down by 24% since COVID-19
- Clients with **chronic low back pain** – down 24%
- Clients with **joint problems/mobility issues** – down 28%
- Clients with **stress and/or anxiety** – down 23%
- Clients with **diagnosed mental health problems** – down 27%
- Clients with **cancer/ recently had cancer** – down 63%
- Clients who are **carers – health professionals** (eg. nurses) – down 37%
- Clients who are **carers – for family member or friend** – down 47%
- Clients who have a **sports-related injury** – down 31%
- Clients who are **pregnant** – down 58%

If these clients are not accessing support from FHT members to help them manage the above health issues, it is a fair assumption that these people are currently either 'suffering it alone' or placing extra burden on the health system – if not now, then at some point in the future.

In addition, more than half (57%) of FHT's complementary therapy practitioners are unsure whether their therapy business will survive the combined impact of COVID-19 and further Government restrictions to practice, which would be a huge loss to the industry and those they support.

I strongly believe that professional therapists should be entitled to continue to work when there are national restrictions in place, in line with other registered health professionals in Northern Ireland, such as osteopaths and physiotherapists. FHT members are trained to nationally recognised standards, are insured, accountable, and follow a strict Code of Conduct and Professional Practice, as well as Government guidelines and COVID-19-specific guidelines produced by the FHT.

As there is every possibility that further restrictions may be necessary in the days, weeks or even months after 13 November, I would be grateful if the Government of Northern Ireland could review this matter urgently.

I look forward to hearing from you soon.

Yours sincerely,

Christopher Byrne,
President of the FHT