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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE:

**ABMP COMMITS TO HELP RAISE MASSAGE THERAPY
STATUS AS LOW-BACK PAIN TREATMENT**

(Evergreen, Colo., Sept. 13) — Associated Bodywork & Massage Professionals (ABMP) today pledged \$15,000 to help gain medical recognition of massage therapy as a treatment for low-back pain, which afflicts millions of Americans.

ABMP is pleased to make a lead grant to the initiative and the funds pledged represent one fourth of those needed to advance a review under the auspices of the National Institutes for Health, Office of Medical Applications of Research.— Called a “consensus conference,” the effort involves testimony and a research review by an independent panel.

“The evidence is there and the time has come,” says Les Sweeney, nationally certified massage therapist and ABMP president. “We moved swiftly to support this initiative because massage therapists are long overdue in receiving medical recognition for the work they do to relieve suffering from back pain.”

An August 2005 issue of *Consumer Reports* cited deep-tissue massage as one of the remedies voted most effective by readers for back pain. Other research shows consumer massage use is as frequent as insurance-paid chiropractic and physical therapy care, yet more than 90 percent of massage therapy is client-paid.

“Massage therapists have long treated low-back pain safely and effectively,” Sweeney says. “They have done so less expensively and less invasively than is possible with other treatments. A favorable finding by the panel could reduce pain and financial hardship for Americans who now pick up the tab for massage therapy or go without care.”

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The last consensus conference addressing back pain was more than a decade ago and led to insurance coverage for spinal manipulation in treating back pain. At the same time, the body of research supporting massage therapy was deemed insufficient to gain similar recognition.

Massage therapy research expert Janet R. Kahn, PhD, believes sufficient research has been conducted since that time to warrant a favorable finding for massage and for some of the other complementary and alternative therapies that could be included in the same consensus conference process. Kahn is the executive director of the Vermont-based Integrated Healthcare Policy Consortium (IHPC), a coalition of some 30 health care professional organizations that will coordinate the request process on behalf of the professions.

Under NIH standards, it takes a “strong body of higher quality evidence — randomized trials and well-designed observational studies” to convene a consensus conference, which includes presentations by investigators, a public comment-and-question session and private deliberations. The process can take two years once NIH–OMAR agrees to a review. Historically, panel findings are the impetus for Medicare and Medicaid reimbursement policies, with many payors following suit.

ABMP serves the massage and bodywork professions and is devoted to promoting ethical practices, fostering acceptance of the professions and protecting the rights of massage and bodywork practitioners.

Since its inception in 1987, ABMP has been an advocate for recognition of the health benefits of massage therapy and its cost-effectiveness as a form of complementary medicine. Headquartered in Evergreen, Colo., ABMP is employee owned and is the largest massage therapy membership association in the nation.

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