



# **ALA Competency Standards for Lymphoedema Practitioners**

1 November 2019

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## Introduction

The ALA Competency Standards for Lymphoedema Practitioners describe the knowledge, skills, attitudes and abilities required of ALA Accredited Lymphoedema Practitioners.

These Competency Standards are intended for use by individual practitioners and training providers. The Competency Standards aim to provide training providers with a framework for the development and assessment of professional competence within the courses that they provide. The development of these Competency Standards is in line with the ALA's intention to place emphasis on learning outcomes, rather than the teaching input, and should provide training providers flexibility to innovate program design and delivery. These Competency Standards are also intended for use by individuals interested in becoming an ALA Accredited Lymphoedema Practitioner. They may also be of interest to members of the public to understand what knowledge is expected, at minimum, by an ALA Accredited Lymphoedema Practitioner.

ALA Accredited Lymphoedema Practitioners may have a range of professional health backgrounds. The treatment of lymphoedema in different body areas will depend on the practitioner's scope of practice within their governing profession and be in accordance with guidelines of cover for their professional indemnity insurance. Recognising this diversity, these Competency Standards consist of general competencies, which should be met by all ALA Accredited Practitioners as well as body region competencies which should be met by practitioners who treat those regions. The Competency Standards contain some examples of knowledge the practitioner is expected to have. These examples have been provided to clarify the competency and are intentionally not exhaustive to allow for new developments in the future. For clarity, these Competency Standards are not meant to be a curriculum document for ALA accredited training providers.

ALA Accredited Lymphoedema Practitioners are expected to practise in an ethical, professional manner and comply with relevant legislation, standards and ethical guidelines. Details on the minimum standards of conduct are described in the Code of Professional Conduct and Ethical Practice.

Practitioners must always act in accordance with the law. These Competency Standards are not a substitute for the provisions of the practitioner's professional governing national laws or other relevant legislation. It is the practitioner's responsibility to be aware of and comply with, the standards, guidelines and policies of their national board.

## 1. Maintain capability for practice

Element	Performance criteria
<p>1.1 Assume responsibility for self-directed learning and continuing professional development</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Develop and maintain referral networks and other relationships relevant to comprehensive lymphoedema management</li> <li>• Review and develop professional knowledge and skills</li> <li>• Proactively seek and respond to professional development opportunities</li> <li>• Demonstrate awareness for accreditation in the ALA's Accredited Lymphoedema Practitioner Program and re-accreditation requirements</li> </ul> <p><u>Note:</u> Practitioners must demonstrate accrual of a minimum of 40 LCPD points in a 2-year period to maintain accreditation.</p>
<p>1.2 Evaluate and maintain own personal health to ensure safe, professional practice</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Demonstrate ability for self-reflection of professional practice</li> <li>• Demonstrate awareness of the potential psychological impact of caring for persons with lymphoedema, and self-care behaviours</li> </ul>

## 2. Person-centred service

Element	Performance criteria
2.1 Empower self-management	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Provide education on risk reduction based on evidence based published literature</li> <li>• Demonstrate ability to modify components of complex lymphoedema treatment when required to assist with self or carer administration of the treatment modality</li> </ul>
2.2 Deliver services that are culturally safe and responsive	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Recognise and communicate with clients and colleagues in a way that is respectful of a person’s dignity, culture, beliefs and values</li> </ul>
2.3 Use person-centred communication to maximise the therapeutic relationship	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Demonstrate use of clear communication tailored to the person and their sociocultural context (e.g. use language that the client will understand)</li> </ul>
2.4 Recognise barriers to patient engagement	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Assess the individual’s psychosocial factors and identify any necessity for referral for psychological or social services</li> <li>• Identify psychosocial issues, which may pose a barrier to engagement or treatment adherence</li> <li>• Describe ways to motivate the individual</li> </ul>

### 3. Foundational knowledge

Element	Performance criteria
3.1 Understand lymphatic anatomy, physiology and function	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Explain lymphatic anatomy (gross structure and fine structure) and lymphatic function</li><li>• Explain the theory of microcirculation (such as fluid exchange in tissues, modified Starling's equilibrium and microcirculation imbalances)</li></ul>
3.2 Understand types or causes of oedema and lymphoedema and associated conditions	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Define and differentiate between types of oedemas, such as primary, secondary, venous and lipoedema</li></ul>

## 4. Clinical assessment

Element	Performance criteria
4.1 Understand factors that affect the lymphatic system	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Document patient and family history of lymphoedema or oedema</li> <li>• Inquire about and document any factors that may increase lymph obligatory load e.g. diuretics or medication and/or other medical conditions</li> <li>• Inquire about and explain risk factors for oedema progression e.g. sedentary lifestyle, high BMI</li> </ul>
4.2 Understand theory of assessment tools	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Explain the use of assessment tools such as the tape measure, bioimpedance spectroscopy and palpation</li> </ul>
4.3 Understand why and when to use imaging assessments	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Explain the application of imaging assessments in practice, e.g. indocyanine green (ICG) lymphography, ultrasound/Doppler, lymphoscintigraphy and magnetic resonance imaging (MRI)</li> </ul>
4.4 Plan assessments	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Apply clinical reasoning to plan for appropriate assessments based on foundational knowledge, patient's history, subjective assessment and other assessments.</li> <li>• Demonstrate consideration of assessment of adjacent regions</li> <li>• Demonstrate consideration of co-morbidities</li> </ul>
4.5 Interpret and evaluate	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Differentiate between normal/abnormal findings</li> <li>• Use clinical reasoning to interpret assessment findings</li> <li>• Classify lymphoedema using classification from various sources, including the International Society of Lymphology (ISL), World Health Organization (WHO), and International Lymphoedema Framework (ILF)</li> </ul>



**Clinical assessment (Head and neck)**

4.6 Obtain and document a comprehensive medical history	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Demonstrate ability to take a comprehensive, clearly documented biopsychosocial history from the patient</li></ul>
4.7 Perform appropriate subjective assessments	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Conduct assessment of symptoms and quality of life</li></ul>
4.8 Perform appropriate objective measurements	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Demonstrate ability to perform relevant objective lymphoedema measurements accurately</li><li>• Demonstrate consideration of other general tests, such as range of motion for the head and neck</li><li>• Conduct assessment of adjacent regions or refer patient for further assessment</li></ul>
4.9 Interpret and evaluate	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Differentiate between normal/abnormal findings</li><li>• Use clinical reasoning to explore and explain the causes of the presenting problem</li><li>• Identify any need for referral to other supporting healthcare professionals</li></ul>

**Clinical assessment (Upper limb)**

4.10 Obtain and document a comprehensive medical history	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Demonstrate ability to take a comprehensive, clearly documented biopsychosocial history from the patient</li></ul>
4.11 Perform appropriate subjective assessments	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Conduct assessment of symptoms and quality of life</li></ul>
4.12 Perform appropriate objective measurements	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Demonstrate ability to perform relevant objective lymphoedema measurements accurately</li><li>• Demonstrate consideration of other general tests, such as range of motion for the upper limbs</li><li>• Conduct assessment of adjacent region of the lymphatic system or refer patient for further assessment</li></ul>
4.13 Interpret and evaluate	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Differentiate between normal/abnormal findings</li><li>• Use clinical reasoning to explore and explain the causes of the presenting problem</li><li>• Identify any need for referral to other supporting healthcare professionals</li></ul>

**Clinical assessment (Breast and trunk)**

4.14 Obtain and document a comprehensive medical history	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Demonstrate ability to take a comprehensive, clearly documented biopsychosocial history from the patient</li></ul>
4.15 Perform appropriate subjective assessments	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Conduct assessment of symptoms and quality of life</li></ul>
4.16 Perform appropriate objective measurements	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Describe how to perform relevant objective lymphoedema measurements accurately</li><li>• Demonstrate consideration of other general tests, such as range of motion for the trunk</li><li>• Conduct assessment of adjacent regions or refer patient for further assessment</li></ul>
4.17 Interpret and evaluate	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Differentiate between normal/abnormal findings</li><li>• Use clinical reasoning to explore and explain the causes of the presenting problem</li><li>• Identify any need for referral to other supporting healthcare professionals</li></ul>

**Clinical assessment (Genital and abdomen)**

4.18 Obtain and document a comprehensive medical history	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Demonstrate ability to take a comprehensive, clearly documented biopsychosocial history from the patient</li></ul>
4.19 Perform appropriate subjective assessments	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Conduct assessment of symptoms and quality of life</li></ul>
4.20 Perform appropriate objective measurements	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Describe how to perform relevant objective lymphoedema measurements accurately</li><li>• Demonstrate consideration of other general tests</li><li>• Conduct assessment of adjacent regions or refer patient for further assessment</li></ul>
4.21 Interpret and evaluate	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Differentiate between normal/abnormal findings</li><li>• Use clinical reasoning to explore and explain the causes of the presenting problem</li><li>• Identify any need for referral to other supporting healthcare professionals</li></ul>

***Clinical assessment (Lower limb)***

4.22 Obtain and document a comprehensive medical history	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Demonstrate ability to take a comprehensive, clearly documented biopsychosocial history from the patient</li></ul>
4.23 Perform appropriate subjective assessments	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Conduct assessment of symptoms and quality of life</li></ul>
4.24 Perform appropriate objective measurements	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Demonstrate ability to perform relevant objective lymphoedema measurements accurately</li><li>• Explain the use of ankle brachial pressure index (ABPI)</li><li>• Demonstrate consideration of other general tests, such as range of motion for the lower limbs</li><li>• Conduct assessment of adjacent regions or refer patient for further assessment</li></ul>
4.25 Interpret and evaluate	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Differentiate between normal/abnormal findings</li><li>• Use clinical reasoning to explore and explain the causes of the presenting problem</li><li>• Identify any need for referral to other supporting healthcare professionals</li></ul>

## 5. Treatment planning

Element	Performance criteria
5.1 Understand theory for treatment modalities	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Explain theory and principles of complex lymphoedema therapy including specialist lymphatic drainage massage, multilayer compression bandaging, wraps and compression garments, skin care, exercise and education, and adjunct therapies</li> </ul>
5.2 Develop a rationale for a treatment plan	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Identify assessment findings and use them to develop a treatment plan with the patient and/or carer</li> </ul>
5.3 Incorporate a risk assessment approach in treatment planning	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Identify any contraindications and need for precautions, e.g. in paediatric patients or patients who are pregnant, elderly, morbidly obese, have advanced metastatic disease, whose condition is palliative or have mixed oedemas</li> </ul>
5.4 Apply principles of chronic disease management	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Demonstrate an approach that focuses on the patient's concerns and priorities, supports patient self-management and arranges follow-up or referral as required</li> </ul>
5.5 Tailor management to the condition and patient	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Demonstrate consideration of phase of treatment – prevention, reduction or maintenance</li> <li>Consider underlying conditions</li> <li>Consider co-morbidities that may contribute to oedema or contraindicate treatment</li> </ul>
5.6 Monitor and evaluate treatment	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Evaluate client progress and seek client feedback about treatment impact and adherence with the treatment plan</li> <li>Evaluate treatment impact on the patient's wellbeing</li> <li>Compare changes and improvements with expectations in the treatment plan, existing research and evidence from own practice</li> <li>Adjust treatment based on evaluation</li> <li>Identify and respond to factors that may be inhibiting client progress</li> </ul>

## 6. Treatment modalities

### *Treatment modalities (Head and neck)*

<b>Element</b>	<b>Performance criteria</b>
6.1 Perform specialist lymphatic drainage massage for head and neck safely and effectively	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Describe indications and contraindications</li><li>• Demonstrate safe and effective lymphatic drainage massage techniques</li></ul>
6.2 Prescribe compression garments appropriately (as appropriate to scope of practice)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Describe indications and contraindications</li><li>• Compare and contrast compression garments</li><li>• Describe how to select a garment for an individual</li><li>• Describe alternative compression systems/night options</li></ul>
6.3 Prescribe exercise appropriately (lymphatic and general exercise program, as appropriate to scope of practice)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Describe the theory and demonstrate appropriate exercises</li><li>• Identify cautions and contraindications to exercise</li></ul>
6.4 Provide advice on skin care regimen (as appropriate to scope of practice)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Describe skin care to optimise the condition of the skin, reverse skin changes and prevent infections</li></ul>
6.5 Provide advice and /or prescribe adjunct therapy (as appropriate to scope of practice)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Outline the use of adjunct therapies such as laser therapy, taping and others</li></ul>

### **Treatment modalities (Upper limb)**

<b>Element</b>	<b>Performance criteria</b>
6.6 Perform specialist lymphatic drainage massage for upper limb safely and effectively	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Describe indications and contraindications</li> <li>• Demonstrate safe and effective lymphatic drainage massage techniques</li> </ul>
6.7 Apply compression bandaging safely and effectively (as appropriate to scope of practice)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Describe indications and contraindications</li> <li>• Demonstrate bandaging techniques safely and effectively</li> <li>• Describe scenarios calling for, and methods of, modifications to bandaging</li> </ul>
6.8 Prescribe compression garments appropriately (as appropriate to scope of practice)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Describe indications and contraindications</li> <li>• Compare and contrast compression garments</li> <li>• Describe how to select a garment for an individual</li> <li>• Describe alternative compression systems/night options</li> </ul>
6.9 Prescribe exercise appropriately (lymphatic and general exercise program, as appropriate to scope of practice)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Describe the theory and demonstrate appropriate exercise</li> <li>• Perform lymphatic stimulatory exercises to promote muscle activity in the upper limb</li> <li>• Identify cautions and contraindications to exercise</li> </ul>
6.10 Provide advice on skin care regimen (as appropriate to scope of practice)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Describe skin care to optimise the condition of the skin, reverse skin changes and prevent infections</li> </ul>
6.11 Provide advice and /or prescribe adjunct therapy (as appropriate to scope of practice)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Outline the use of adjunct therapies such as laser therapy, taping, surgical treatment, compression pumps and others</li> </ul>

**Treatment modalities (Breast and trunk)**

Element	Performance criteria
6.12 Perform specialist lymphatic drainage massage for the breast and trunk safely and effectively	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Describe indications and contraindications</li> <li>• Demonstrate safe and effective lymphatic drainage massage techniques</li> </ul>
6.13 Apply compression bandaging safely and effectively (as appropriate to scope of practice)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Describe indications and contraindications</li> <li>• Demonstrate safe and effective bandaging techniques</li> <li>• Describe scenarios calling for, and methods of, modifications to bandaging</li> </ul>
6.14 Prescribe compression garments appropriately (as appropriate to scope of practice)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Describe indications and contraindications</li> <li>• Compare and contrast compression garments</li> <li>• Describe how to select a garment for an individual</li> <li>• Describe alternative compression systems/night options</li> </ul>
6.15 Prescribe exercise appropriately (lymphatic and general exercise program, as appropriate to scope of practice)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Describe the theory and demonstrate appropriate exercise, including breast exercise and trunk rotation exercises</li> <li>• Identify cautions and contraindications to exercise</li> </ul>
6.16 Provide advice on skin care regimen (as appropriate to scope of practice)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Describe skin care to optimise the condition of the skin, reverse skin changes and prevent infections</li> </ul>
6.17 Provide advice and /or prescribe adjunct therapy (as appropriate to scope of practice)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Outline the use of adjunct therapies such as laser therapy, taping, surgical treatment, compression pumps and others</li> </ul>

**Treatment modalities (Genital and abdomen)**

<b>Element</b>	<b>Performance criteria</b>
6.18 Perform specialist lymphatic drainage massage of the genital region and abdomen safely and effectively	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Describe indications and contraindications</li> <li>• Demonstrate safe and effective lymphatic drainage massage techniques</li> </ul>
6.19 Apply compression bandaging safely and effectively (as appropriate to scope of practice)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Describe indications and contraindications</li> <li>• Demonstrate bandaging techniques</li> <li>• Describe scenarios calling for, and methods of, modifications to bandaging</li> </ul>
6.20 Prescribe compression garments and genital support appropriately (as appropriate to scope of practice)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Describe indications and contraindications</li> <li>• Compare and contrast compression garments</li> <li>• Describe how to select a garment for an individual</li> <li>• Describe alternative compression systems/night options</li> </ul>
6.21 Prescribe exercise appropriately (lymphatic and general exercise program, as appropriate to scope of practice)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Describe the theory and demonstrate appropriate exercise</li> <li>• Identify cautions and contraindications to exercise</li> </ul>
6.22 Provide advice on skin care regimen (as appropriate to scope of practice)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Describe skin care to optimise the condition of the skin, reverse skin changes and prevent infections</li> </ul>
6.23 Provide advice and /or prescribe adjunct therapy (as appropriate to scope of practice)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Outline the use of adjunct therapies such as laser therapy, taping and others</li> </ul>



### **Treatment modalities (Lower limb)**

<b>Element</b>	<b>Performance criteria</b>
6.24 Perform specialist lymphatic drainage massage for lower limb safely and effectively	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Describe indications and contraindications</li> <li>• Demonstrate safe and effective lymphatic drainage massage techniques</li> </ul>
6.25 Apply compression bandaging safely and effectively (as appropriate to scope of practice)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Describe indications and contraindications</li> <li>• Demonstrate safe and effective bandaging techniques</li> <li>• Describe scenarios calling for, and methods of, modifications to bandaging</li> </ul>
6.26 Prescribe compression garments appropriately (as appropriate to scope of practice)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Describe indications and contraindications</li> <li>• Compare and contrast compression garments</li> <li>• Describe how to select a garment for an individual</li> <li>• Describe alternative compression systems/night options</li> </ul>
6.27 Prescribe exercise appropriately (lymphatic and general exercise program, as appropriate to scope of practice)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Describe the theory and demonstrate appropriate exercise</li> <li>• Perform lymphatic stimulatory exercises to promote muscle activity in the lower limb</li> <li>• Identify cautions and contraindications to exercise</li> </ul>
6.28 Provide advice on skin care regimen (as appropriate to scope of practice)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Describe skin care to optimise the condition of the skin, reverse skin changes and prevent infections</li> </ul>
6.29 Provide advice and /or prescribe adjunct therapy (as appropriate to scope of practice)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Outline the use of adjunct therapies such as laser therapy, taping, surgical treatment, compression pumps and others</li> </ul>

**Approved by the NLPR Committee and ALA Board**

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