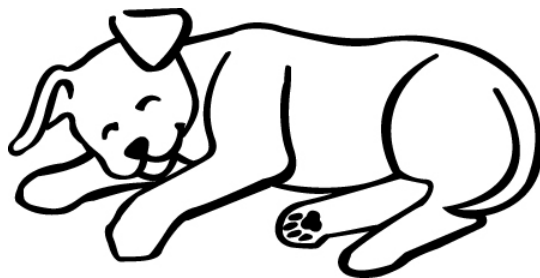


# Holistic Choices e-Book

## **How to become a canine massage provider**

*By Margaret Auld-Louie*



OPTIMUM CHOICES, LLC  
*Healthy choices for people and pets*

Disclaimer: we are not doctors, veterinarians or certified nutritionists nor do we have any medical training. We do have bachelor degrees in biology and geophysical engineering and a M.S. Degree in Telecommunications. We also have certificates in canine massage, Reiki Master/Teacher, Reiki for Animals, ARCH (Ancient Rainbow Conscious Healing) and aromatherapy training. We do have 75+ years of combined holistic living experience.

Holistic Choices e-Books are not meant to be a detailed authority on the subject. e-Books are simply a compilation of our research and 75+ years of practical holistic experience. Please consult a professional healthcare practitioner (e.g., doctor, veterinarian) for proper medical attention.

Every person and animal is an individual with a different set of genes, physiology, diet, lifestyle, etc. Every person and animal, therefore, will respond differently to the same food, product or holistic modality. Results in the e-Books are based on individual case studies and your results may be different.

Our hope is that by sharing our 75+ years of holistic experience one will get a better understanding of true holistic wellness.

*These statements have not been evaluated by the FDA. This information is not intended to diagnose, treat or cure any disease.*



**3rd Edition, April 2007**  
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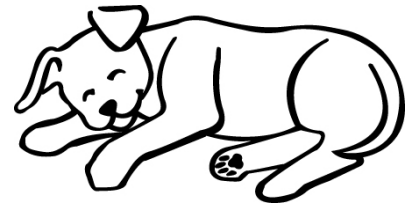
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## Introduction

As a canine massage provider with an established website and presence in the community, I receive frequent inquiries about how to get into the field of canine massage. Canine massage is a rapidly growing profession that can be very rewarding but be aware that it is still in the early stages. In just the last few years, interest in studying canine massage has exploded. Prior to that, just a handful of people offered canine massage, mostly at dog shows. Most dog owners don't understand the benefits of massage yet, while the states and veterinarians are struggling to regulate it properly.



The people entering the field now are the pioneers, which means you have to figure things out on your own, put a lot of effort into marketing and educating potential customers and you may have to travel for training. This is not an established career yet where the answers are all figured out and the path to success is clear. Some people contacting me with questions assume this is an established profession and that there must be a canine massage school in every city, including the one they live in (and they just haven't found it yet). Unlike human massage, this is not the case yet. There are few practitioners and fewer schools.

There are also few professional groups. The only active national/international one that I am aware of is the International Association of Animal Massage & Bodywork (IAAMB: [www.iaamb.org](http://www.iaamb.org)). They offer yearly education conferences, provide liability insurance for members and work on legal issues surrounding the profession. If you want a local networking group of animal practitioners, you will probably have to start your own. I started the Colorado Association of Animal Massage & Bodywork (an independent chapter of IAAMB) because I wanted the opportunity to network locally (see: [www.OptimumChoices.com/caamb.htm](http://www.OptimumChoices.com/caamb.htm)).



Being a pioneer in a field is both exciting and difficult. You will encounter ridicule from people who don't understand what you are doing. People will laugh when you tell them you do "dog massage". Some veterinarians will feel their "turf" is being infringed on or assume you don't know what you are doing because you are not a doctor (DVM). However, other people will be very appreciative of your services and your ability to help their dog or their clients' dogs. This is not the field for you if you can't handle the criticism, ridicule and difficulties that a pioneer encounters, including outright failure at times.

To succeed, you either have to be unaffected by criticism or your desire to explore new territory has to be stronger than your susceptibility to criticism. Be prepared to "forge your own path" as you pursue a career in canine massage. I don't have all the answers on how to create a successful career as a canine massage provider. I am still working to build my own practice, while working another job part-time. What I can do is tell you how to get trained, what the legal issues are surrounding the profession, what obstacles you will encounter in building a practice (I have encountered many), how to develop your personal style of working with dogs and some ideas to market your practice. I have also included a list of books and

## Training & certification

I receive frequent inquiries about how to get “certified” in animal or canine massage. There is no such thing yet as “official certification” in canine massage because there is no third party, independent organization certifying massage providers. Someone could take a weekend course in massage, get a “certificate” and say they are “certified”. Also, there is no state licensing yet in animal massage, as there is for human massage, though some states have passed laws limiting who can do bodywork on animals. For instance, Washington State requires you to be a certified human massage therapist or veterinarian to do massage on animals. Everyone else who was doing animal massage had to cease and desist from practicing it.



Other states may have requirements such as being visually supervised by a veterinarian while you perform massage (though few practitioners actually do this, since it’s not practical). Every state has their own law defining what constitutes the practice of veterinary medicine, called the “Veterinary Practice Act” (meaning only a veterinarian, or, in some cases, someone supervised by a vet, can perform it). Legally, calling yourself a “canine massage therapist” is violating the Veterinary Practice Act because only veterinarians can do “therapy.” So “canine massage provider” is a better term to use. In most states, alternative or complementary therapies such as massage are included in the definition of “veterinary medicine.” The State of Arizona is currently attempting to pass a law exempting alternative therapies, such as massage from the definition of “veterinary medicine”, however it is encountering vigorous opposition from the Arizona Veterinary Association.

The day is fast approaching when there will be certification and licensing for animal massage providers. The International Association of Animal Massage & Bodywork ([IAAMB](#)) plans to establish a testing program that will certify animal bodyworkers. This is a good thing because it will guarantee a certain level of training and knowledge for practitioners and discourage veterinarians from outlawing all non-vets from performing bodywork on animals. I suggest you get the most professional and extensive training you can afford in animal massage, so that you will have the education you need to become officially certified later. Since most states require a minimum of 500 hours to become a licensed human massage therapist, it would be a good idea to aim for the same minimum number of hours in your massage training.

In rigorous animal bodywork training, you’ll learn anatomy (locations of bones and muscles), physiology (how the systems of the body function, such as circulatory, nervous, muscular, endocrine, etc.) and orthopedic pathology (disorders and diseases of the bones), so that you will know what you are doing when working on animals and you can communicate intelligently with other professionals, such as veterinarians and chiropractors. Good schools will also cover structure and gait, as well as animal behavior. If you do part of your training by home study, be sure to get some hands-on training as well, so you can learn to do the massage techniques properly. This is something where you need a teacher there in-person to guide and correct you. There are cases of inadequately trained people who have hurt animals while doing bodywork on them. That is one reason veterinarians are wary of having non-vets work on animals.