

POSITION PAPER

**Professional Association of Shiatsu
Practitioners and Teachers**



www.shiatsuapos.com

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Shiatsu, a discipline for the individual and the community



1. Introduction

With this document, we intend to define a necessary position statement by APOS regarding the role of Shiatsu in contemporary society, in light of current developments, and with the aim of establishing an open dialogue with institutions, as well as with the educational, healthcare, sports, and social volunteering sectors, and in any other field where activities promoting human well-being and health are required.

In full respect of the founding values set out in the Statute of APOS we intend to promote an exchange of perspectives and approaches within a spirit of collaboration, thereby building a bridge between Eastern and Western cultures to place the human beings and the expression of their vitality at the center.

Today, we all recognize the value of cultural plurality in relation to health and well-being. This value is expressed through holistic approaches and specific projects, some of which we already carry out, but which it is now time to further clarify and actively support.

We firmly believe that Shiatsu can contribute to fostering personal growth, body awareness, and the promotion of balance between body, mind, and spirit—outcomes that arise from learning and practicing an evolutionary technique such as Shiatsu. These are the very foundations of a peaceful society, made up of individuals who are at peace and in harmony with others and with the surrounding environment.

Shiatsu is a hands-on, body-mediated discipline codified in Japan, where it is recognized by the Ministry of Health, Labour and Welfare; it draws its origins from ancient Eastern techniques.

It makes use of pressures (applied with the thumb, palm, elbow or knee), mobilizations, and other techniques on specific areas or points of the body with the aim of stimulating the functionality of the musculoskeletal, circulatory, nervous, and energetic systems. It promotes processes of allostasis in order to support and/or restore psychophysical balance, stimulating the body's natural self-regulation processes and enhancing the individual's vital resources.

Shiatsu does not focus on the symptom; rather, it considers the person as a whole, positioning itself as a health-oriented practice that improves overall well-being and quality of life.

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Shiatsu does not involve the use of oils or creams, nor of aids or instruments that fall within the professional competence of healthcare or beauty practitioners. It adapts to everyone, regardless of age, body structure or physical condition.

In Italy, Shiatsu falls within the category of non-regulated intellectual professions governed by Law 4/2013, which establishes conditions to protect users of professional services. The law entrusts associations that meet the requirements set forth in the regulation with the task of verifying that practitioners and teachers possess—and maintain over time—adequate professional competence.

The Shiatsu professional, regulated pursuant to Law 4/2013, practices a “profession,” that is to say, an economic and organized activity aimed at providing services to third parties, carried out habitually and predominantly through intellectual work (cf. Art. 1, paragraph 2), or at least with a significant intellectual component. These activities do not fall within those reserved by law to healthcare professions, nor among artisanal trades.

The APOS professional refrains from any medical or healthcare act, such as taking a medical history or making a diagnosis; avoids using terms that may create misunderstandings or false expectations; and does not use titles or qualifications that could cause clients to confuse their role with that of other professional figures. They may take part in interdisciplinary teams, collaborating with professionals from different fields and participating in joint projects, within the limits of their own competence.

Shiatsu practice is the expression of a distinctive training pathway provided by training institutions that operate with educational and professional autonomy, without overlapping with activities belonging to sectors regulated or governed by other European or national laws.

The Shiatsu Operator is identified by ATECO Code 2025 no. 86.99.01, within the section “Human Health Activities,” under “Body Treatment Techniques”; the Shiatsu Teacher is identified by ATECO Code 85.59.99 within the “Education and Training” section. The ISTAT code is no. 3.2.1.7.0, “Popular Medicine Technicians.”

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APOS stands as a guarantor of high-quality Shiatsu, based on a training program of at least 800 hours, spread over a minimum period of three years.

An APOS member is required to undertake continuous professional development, to comply with the code of ethics, and to hold professional liability insurance (RCP)

2. Context

In line with the professional training provided, Shiatsu does not address an individual's pathological condition; rather, its purpose is to consider the person as a whole, in their functional unity, and within their environment. This makes it possible to benefit from Shiatsu in a wide range of situations.

We therefore consider necessary to:

- a. Distinguish Shiatsu from healthcare or aesthetic professions**, with which it does not overlap but may collaborate within its specific area of competence.
- b. Enhance its autonomous contribution**, centered on well-being and the improvement of the individual's quality of life, and on the support, it can offer to the person;
- c. Open a constructive dialogue with institutions** so that the social, educational, and cultural value of Shiatsu in the maintenance and promotion of health may be recognized, in accordance with the 1948 definition of health by the World Health Organization, according to which health is "a state of complete physical, mental and social well-being".

Within this framework, APOS is open to constructive and collaborative dialogue, respecting the specific characteristics of each discipline and placing at the center the expression of human vitality, regardless of age or condition. The United Nations 2030 Agenda identifies "Goal 3" as the promotion of a culture aimed at supporting an Integrative Medicine approach—one that can integrate different techniques in its application and that places the human being, rather than pathology, at the center. This involves different professions and roles that can interact and work together in mutual respect of their respective areas of competence. In this sense, many field experiences have been carried out in recent years by Shiatsu practitioners in volunteer, educational, healthcare, and assistance settings.

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3. Our Position

Shiatsu defines itself as:

- an **autonomous discipline**, with specific professional training, based on a holistic and systemic vision of the human being;
- an **educational approach** to health, which fosters body awareness, stress management, and overall well-being. Through this process of awareness, the individual develops an active role in managing their own state of health;
- a **relational practice** founded on listening, respect for the person, and empathetic interaction through conscious touch.

4. Openness to research

We have been committed for many years to promoting rigorous research that investigates and documents the benefits of Shiatsu, in full respect of its historical and cultural characteristics, and in dialogue with universities, scientific research institutions, and practitioners from other disciplines.

This research aims to:

- validate, including through objective data, the effects of Shiatsu on health and overall well-being;
- contribute to the debate on integrative medicine in alignment with the United Nations 2030 Agenda (see, for example, the proceedings of the 1st Profession Shiatsu Conference entitled “*Shiatsu in Integrative Medicine – Current Experiences and Future Perspectives*,” held in Venice on June 16, 2023) - Full conference proceedings, available for download at the following link:
https://drive.google.com/file/d/1hO9aQIYMnW0PNc7s0r_tPv3PsIgqMujI
- contribute, through Shiatsu, to the development of new perspectives in promoting integrated health, enhancing both the individual and collective dimensions.

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5. Proposal for intersectoral collaboration

We believe that Shiatsu can make a positive contribution to:

- **Educational projects**, from early childhood schools to universities, as a tool for growth, awareness, and personal development.
- **Volunteer activities**, in contexts of vulnerability, hardship, or social marginalization, including in situations involving catastrophic events, where personal support is needed.
- **Collaboration with the healthcare sector**, without therapeutic purposes, as support for improving quality of life—for example, accompanying individuals in end-of-life care pathways in hospices and dedicated facilities.
- **The promotion of well-being in workplaces** and communities through educational and preventive interventions
- **Synergistic collaboration with other professional figures.**

6. Conclusions

The medium and long-term objectives of APOS are:

1. To achieve **recognition of Shiatsu as an autonomous and professional discipline**, distinct from regulated categories.
2. To foster **collaboration** and **complementarity**, in full respect of the competencies of each profession.

It is not an objective of APOS to be assimilated into or subordinated to other professional figures, whether in the healthcare field or otherwise; nor to entrust the practitioner's training pathway to bodies other than the current affiliated training institutions, in continuity with past practice.