

Dear Board of Directors,

March 29, 2024

I hope this message finds you all well. In response to the Executive Committee's recent communication, the lack of substantive engagement intensifies our significant concerns. Notably, the absence of 1) an inclusive consultation process, 2) a comprehensive impact assessment, and 3) a clear demonstration of due diligence departs from the principles that have guided our profession. Given this context, and in accordance with the bylaws of the International Association of Yoga Therapists, we respectfully urge the Board of Directors to invoke Article II, Section 4, of the bylaws, which allows for the initiation of a special meeting by the President or by two or more Directors without the need to justify the reasoning for such a meeting. In addition, our bylaws defer to Robert's Rules for matters not specifically spelled out in our bylaws, and as I am sure you are aware, Robert's Rules has strong language supporting the principle that boards and committees operate transparently and inclusively, ensuring all members' voices are heard and encourages bodies like boards to be responsive to the concerns of their constituents, facilitating a mechanism for addressing issues in a democratic and orderly manner.

Below is a parsed review and our response to Alyssa Wostrel's letter titled Foundations\_Letter RE\_3-20-24.

### Quick Overview of the List of Concerns

**Lack of Inclusivity and Transparency:** The response lacks examples of inclusive member consultation or transparency in the QHP program's introduction and approval process.

**Logistical and Financial Impracticalities:** No mention, acknowledgment, or evidence is provided to address concerns regarding logistical and financial challenges for accredited member schools.

**Dilution of Yoga Therapy Standards:** The response does not address concerns about the potential dilution of the depth of Yoga therapy education.

**Impact on Student Diversity and Financial Accessibility:** The letter does not address concerns related to student diversity and financial accessibility or the implications of creating a separate, shorter pathway for QHPs.

**Perception and Integrity of the Profession:** The response does not address concerns about the potential negative impact on the profession's perception and integrity.

**Governance Concerns:** While board reviews and discussions are mentioned, the governance process or relevant member involvement is not explained, especially in the decision-making process for the QHP program.

**Call for Pause and Comprehensive Review:** Although a future assessment is mentioned, there is no indication of a willingness to pause the program's implementation for a comprehensive, immediate review based on what we have brought to light, including current member feedback and concerns.

**Section-by-section Review:** *the bold headings are from the letter*

### **Before 2015**

• References to discussions and publications before 2015 on integrating Yoga into healthcare lack relevance to the QHP program's current critique. Moreover, the passage of nine years since 2015 renders any cited involvement from members, Board, or committees during this period outdated and irrelevant; any comments will undoubtedly be disconnected from the current state and needs of the Yoga therapy community.

### **2015-2016**

• The consultations with staff, stakeholders, and board members about the "*LHCP concept*" in 2015–2016 are outdated and do not represent the present needs and status of the Yoga therapy community, especially considering the significant changes within the organization as well as the profession's evolution since then. The LHCP concept at this time had nothing to do with fast-track training, nor did it mention reducing training standards for LHCP (see 2017); therefore, any consultation at this time had nothing to do with the IAYT-Q program.

### **2017**

• Again, this is outdated and irrelevant. More importantly, most of the wording is too vague to be useful in determining if there was any due diligence: "*BOD explores training for...*" what was presented to the Board and by whom? What kind of exploration?

• The special interest group sessions focused on the unique challenges that LHCPs faced and on the integration and contributions of LHCPs who were also fully trained 800-hour accredited Yoga therapists; there was no mention of reduced training requirements.

• The "*LHCP-Yoga-Therapy-Today-Fall-2017*" document was linked as if it related to the QHP fast-track course, but it does not. It focuses on integrating Yoga therapy into healthcare, and the significant contributions are driven by the skills and knowledge of practitioners who meet established professional standards (CIAYT). It discusses the importance of professional standards in Yoga therapy and the integration process. The document does not mention a separate 300-hour training program or describe a fast-track pathway that makes Yoga therapy fit into conventional medical or mental health SOP.

## **2018**

- The initiatives in 2018, including proposed pilot programs and the establishment of a task force, do not mention member or stakeholder involvement, no explanation of selection criteria, and, once again, considering the substantial evolution in the Yoga therapy field and organizational changes over the past six years, they are no longer relevant.
- The title of the LHCP program's certification was "Therapeutic Yoga Practices," which aligns with IAYT's existing recognition for 300-hour training completion ("teacher of Therapeutic Yoga")—it did not include potentially misleading designations like IAYT-Q. To maintain the integrity of our field, "IAYT" needs to represent the full high standards we have built over the past four decades.

## **2019**

- The 2019 *"Discussions continue with IAYT staff and committees regarding professional development for LHCPs and pilot implementation"* does not reference earlier "discussions" content or time, nor does it outline who made up the "committees" and how the committees were formed.
- The statement lacks any relevance or detailed disclosure that confirms that due diligence was exercised. This omission of dialogue topics, research undertakings, and viewpoint representations in the response fails to present stakeholders with a careful, inclusive, and transparent process behind the IAYT-Q program's conception and validation.

## **2020-2022**

- The document [https://www.iayt.org/page/LHCP\\_SOP](https://www.iayt.org/page/LHCP_SOP) does not relate to the IAYT-Q program but focuses on fully accredited CIAYTs. It addresses concerns of licensed healthcare practitioners incorporating Yoga therapy into their scope of practice without mentioning a fast track or the necessity for one, rendering this document irrelevant to the context of the IAYT-Q program development or due diligence.
- The mention of the COVID-19 pandemic's impact on pilot explorations and the initiative by the Maryland University of Integrative Health points to continuing educational exploration without directly advancing the specifics of the IAYT-Q program. The title "Therapeutic Yoga Practices" suggests alignment with IAYT's existing recognition for 300-hour training completions, not indicating a move toward the controversial IAYT-Q designation.
- Strategic Plan Discrepancies: The Strategic Plan 2021-2024 emphasizes inclusivity, diversity, and a collaborative approach to advancing Yoga therapy as a recognized and respected therapy. However, it does not mention or outline the development of a fast-track IAYT-Q program, which heightens our concerns about misalignment with IAYT's stated strategic priorities, especially regarding inclusivity, transparency, and maintaining the integrity of Yoga therapy education and certification.
- Missing Link in Justification: The documents and the overall response lack justification for the IAYT-Q program that directly connects to the strategic priorities as suggested in this section, particularly regarding how this program supports the mission to advance the profession of Yoga therapy, ensure inclusivity, and uphold the high standards of education and practice within the community.

## 2023

- The strategic redirection toward training QHPs in Yoga principles for therapeutic settings deviates from the strategic plan's core objective of integrating fully trained CIAYTs into healthcare. This shift seems less about embedding the comprehensive Yoga therapy model within healthcare and more about imparting basic Yoga principles to QHPs; it should not have the "IAYT" emblem or acronym associated with a partial education in Yoga Therapy.
- The referenced Adams article supports diverse practitioners' inclusion of Yoga in healthcare, focusing on the broader, established benefits and application of Yoga therapy rather than suggesting a truncated training model. Therefore, including this article as "supporting evidence" is misleading.
- There is a notable absence of discussion on adapting Yoga therapy's distinct practices to fit narrower medical or mental health SOPs, diluting Yoga therapy's unique contributions to healthcare. The emphasized simplified introduction of Yoga for QHPs without the depth of CIAYT training misaligns with the strategic plan's vision of promoting Yoga therapy's holistic benefits in healthcare settings.

### **Addressing Needs and Gaps for the Yoga Therapy Profession**

- The claims of gaps for the Yoga therapy profession do not discuss how the gaps have been measured, who measured them, or how often the gap measurement is reassessed, nor does it mention who confirms the validity of such "gap" claims.
- The claims of aligning with strategic priorities and filling gaps in the Yoga therapy profession do not address the core concerns about the dilution of what defines Yoga therapy to fit the scope of other professions. The mention of various programs providing Yoga and "Yoga therapy" training to healthcare providers without meeting IAYT's standards, while highlighting the Foundations of Therapeutic Yoga Principles educational pathway, overlooks the fundamental issue: the significant reduction in training hours fundamentally alters the depth and breadth of what Yoga therapy entails. This move toward a simplified training model for QHPs, masked under the guise of filling a professional gap, ignores the importance of a holistic approach integral to fully accredited CIAYT training and practice.
- The absence of any discourse on member and accredited schools' involvement further shows the lack of due diligence before implementing the IAYT-Q fast track.
- The IAYT-Q fast track risks compromising Yoga therapy's distinct qualities by reducing it to an adjunct of current healthcare practices rather than promoting its full potential as a standalone, holistic field.
- Additionally, the growing acceptance of Yoga Therapy, as evidenced by the significant portion (36%) of current students who are also QHPs from other fields, demonstrates a closing gap in the healthcare community's recognition of Yoga Therapy's value. The increasing acceptance should have been assessed to determine if a "need" exists to warrant a radical shift in our training environment and professional reputation.
- There is no mention of the multitudes of Yoga Therapists currently working within healthcare and have for decades endured the long road of proving the efficacy and value of Yoga Therapy's potential as a standalone healing modality and a powerful addition to integrative healthcare models.
- Many see Yoga Therapy as a comprehensive and valued profession within healthcare; unfortunately, our association does not seem to share this opinion.

## **Details of the Foundations Pathway and the Opportunity for Yoga Therapy Training Programs**

- The introduction of the 300-hour Foundations pathway as a potential business opportunity for schools and a mechanism for integrating Yoga into healthcare through QHPs fails to address the substantive issues raised by the Yoga therapy community. It presents a clear diversion from the Yoga therapy education that schools, members, former board members, staff, and committees have invested an immense amount of time, energy, and money in helping to co-create to keep the high standards of IAYT and the field of Yoga Therapy.
- There is no mention of potential competitive disadvantage for existing programs, which could marginalize the 800-hour comprehensive training essential for Yoga Therapy work.
- There is no mention of the potential challenges for the schools posed by introducing a fast-track certification track run separately from the existing program.
- The promise of increased visibility and referral networks seems to be based on the very controversial and mostly debunked trickle-down theory, though it is not stated; it does not mention any supporting evidence of why or how this trickle-down could happen.
- Nothing will compensate for the erosion of educational depth or the potential confusion among healthcare providers and the public about what Yoga therapy, as defined by full CIAYT standards, truly represents.

## **Third-Party Accreditation**

- Mentioning third-party accreditation and licensure discussions does not address our immediate concerns about the IAYT-Q program's development and its alignment with the values and standards of the Yoga therapy community. This diversion into broader accreditation talks does not tackle the crucial issues of transparency, inclusivity, and the preservation of Yoga therapy's holistic nature in the face of a fast-track model. While seemingly attempting to assure a quality oversight vision, this section completely sidesteps the urgent call for accountability and detailed scrutiny regarding how the IAYT-Q program fits within the existing and respected Yoga therapy education and practice framework.

The letter we received from Alyssa was the Executive Committee's opportunity to share their evidence for the optimism, acceptance, and validation they are asking us to embrace. However, there is a complete lack of evidence to support their argument that our concerns are invalid. Where do we go from here?

As we all navigate this challenging situation, our organization's governance and delineating responsibilities between the Executive Committee (EC) and the Board of Directors (BOD) warrant careful attention. While managing day-to-day operations as outlined in our bylaws, the EC operates under the BOD's overarching authority and oversight, which ensures that members' voices are heard, and the EC's actions align with the community's ethos and welfare.

We acknowledge the challenges of navigating our association's governance amidst competitive and regulatory pressures. In line with the principles of responsive and inclusive governance, as supported by Robert's Rules of Order and our bylaws, we seek the Board's proactive engagement. The BOD's role in governance ensures that

all voices within our community are heard and considered, especially in matters of significant impact, such as the IAYT-Q program. To put it plainly, we do not feel that ANY voices of our current community have been heard, and therefore, it is imperative that the BOD intervene on the community's behalf.

#### Dual Purpose will be Served with Board Action

The persistent historical disconnect between our members and leadership is now at a critical juncture. The unveiling of the IAYT-Q program has brought us to a crossroads, where the potential for a widening gap looms large, particularly as the broader membership becomes aware of the concerns surrounding the program's development (in our estimation, the vast majority of IAYT members are not aware at this time). However, this moment presents us with an unparalleled opportunity for historical collective growth and reconnection with our core values.

We respectfully call on you to lead us forward by intervening on the community's behalf. A special session dedicated to the IAYT-Q program's review represents more than the opportunity for due diligence; it is a step towards healing and unity.

Our appeal is grounded in trust in your leadership and the ethical standards that guide us all. We stand ready to support and unite behind the Board's decisive action, confident in our shared vision for the future of Yoga Therapy. Your response to this call will not only shape our immediate path but will also protect our legacy.