



The American Association of Naturopathic Physicians (AANP) is the national professional association representing licensed naturopathic physicians, the leading experts in natural medicine.

Federal Recognition of Naturopathic Physicians

Removing Barriers | Opening Doors

Our federal recognition campaign aims to change outdated federal laws so that licensed naturopathic doctors can be a greater asset to our healthcare system.

With a rapidly declining workforce of physicians, rising healthcare expenses, and an aging population, the U.S. healthcare system needs policy solutions to help address these challenges.

Licensed naturopathic doctors (NDs) graduate from four-year, doctoral-level medical programs and are trained to provide primary care to diagnose, treat, and prevent chronic and acute conditions. Their whole-person approach to care incorporates behavioral, lifestyle, and other minimally invasive treatments to prevent disease and improve patient outcomes.

As a trained healthcare workforce ready to address our health system challenges, licensed NDs face barriers that prevent them from doing so. With patients and lawmakers embracing concepts of whole-person health in recent years, there is a unique opportunity to expand patient access to a qualified healthcare workforce that provides affordable, safe, and effective care. ¹

THE ISSUE

Outdated federal laws prevent licensed naturopathic doctors (NDs) from addressing the challenges of our healthcare system, including the provider shortage, filling vacant health jobs, and providing whole-person care to underserved and Medicare patients.

ROOT CAUSE OF THE ISSUE

The term “physician” in Title XVIII of the Social Security Act does not include licensed naturopathic doctors (NDs). The limited and outdated definition of “physician” is referenced in various public health legislation, including Medicare, that provides physicians with funding, resources, and access to federal health programs.

POLICY SOLUTION

Update the definition of “physician” in Title XVIII of the Social Security Act to include licensed naturopathic doctors (NDs) so that it accurately reflects the landscape of trained and qualified providers today.

How Federal Recognition of Licensed NDs Benefits Communities

We are advocating for Congress to change the outdated and limited definition of “physician” in the Social Security Act to include licensed naturopathic doctors (NDs) so that they can be greater assets to our healthcare system. By doing so, licensed naturopathic doctors (NDs) will be included in the laws governing Medicare, allowing them to help alleviate the provider shortage, fill vacant healthcare jobs, provide whole-person care to Medicare populations and under-resourced communities, and more. **Benefits of federal recognition include:**

Licensed NDs would be able to **provide whole-person care to more patients**, including:

- Medicare patients - who are currently forced to either pay out of pocket or lose access to their licensed ND once enrolled in Medicare, disrupting their continuity of care
- Patients in underserved and rural communities - which have very high percentages of Medicare-eligible populations
- Patients in Federally Qualified Health Centers (FQHCs) or rural clinics - which have very high percentages of Medicare-eligible populations

Licensed NDs would be able to **address the primary care provider shortage** and **fill vacant healthcare jobs**, such as those in:

- Federally Qualified Health Centers (FQHCs) and rural clinics. Currently, it is economically unfeasible for FQHCs (who are tied to Medicare funding) to hire licensed NDs (who lack Medicare coverage) for unfilled positions.
- Healthcare roles that require providers to complete a residency before hiring. Currently, because licensed NDs are ineligible Medicare providers, they are unable to apply to Medicare-funded residencies. This prevents them from filling more healthcare jobs that require residencies.

Help provide credibility and leverage in **conversations to make naturopathic medicine more accessible** to more patients across the nation, including those for:

- State licensure
- Scope expansion
- Insurance coverage
- Including NDs in the VA's Whole Health program so that veterans can get access to naturopathic care

Medicare could cover the costs of essential laboratory testing and diagnostic imaging, even when ordered by NDs who opt out of being a Medicare provider.

Licensed NDs could sign off for hospice, home help, and convalescent care services.

Campaign Goals

The AANP works to remove federal barriers so that NDs can practice to the full extent of their education and training and be compensated for it. We educate policymakers on how licensed NDs are an asset to our healthcare system - and how their exclusion from the laws that govern Medicare limits their ability to be of greater service.

We are advocating for Congress to change the outdated and limited definition of "physician" in the Social Security Act to include licensed naturopathic doctors (NDs) so that they can be better assets to our healthcare system. By doing so, licensed naturopathic doctors (NDs) will be included in the laws that govern Medicare, allowing them to help alleviate the provider shortage, fill vacant healthcare jobs, provide whole-person care to Medicare populations and underserved communities, and more.

- **Educate** the public, providers, patients, and policymakers on the benefits of federal recognition of licensed NDs.
- **Drive Action** by having patients, providers, and supporters of the naturopathic profession voice their concerns to Congress.
- **Find Legislative Champions to Pass a Bill** that updates the definition of "physician" in the Social Security Act to include licensed NDs.

Support the campaign to get federal recognition of licensed NDs by taking action at www.naturopathic.org/FederalRecognition

1. 113th Congress (2013-2014). A resolution designating the week of October 6 through October 12, 2014, as "Naturopathic Medicine Week" to recognize the value of naturopathic medicine in providing safe, effective, and affordable health care. Washington, DC: Library of Congress, 2014 Sep 18.