For Immediate Release

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Joint Statement from AANMC and AANP on Department of Education Actions Impacting Professional Student Loan Access

The Association of Accredited Naturopathic Medical Colleges (AANMC) and the American Association of Naturopathic Physicians (AANP) are deeply concerned by the U.S. Department of Education's proposed definition of professional degree programs that excludes many health professions, including Naturopathic Medicine, Nursing, PA, and PT, and restricts access to federal graduate student loans for many health professions, including naturopathic medicine. These changes are not aligned with the nation's need to build and sustain a full and effective healthcare workforce—one that reflects the variety of disciplines needed to meet rising demands for whole-person, preventive, and integrative care. Further, exclusion of naturopathic doctors undermines the Department of Health and Human Services' goals that emphasize primary care and preventive whole-health models focused on lifestyle and nutrition—core areas of naturopathic expertise. More than six million Americans trust naturopathic doctors with their care, reflecting the profession's growing importance.

It is imperative to note that naturopathic medicine meets the definition of a professional degree in the same category as MDs, DOs and DCs, and was originally classified as such by the U.S. government in 2003. In the last twenty years, naturopathic medical education has only become more rigorous and robust to prepare students for licensure, resulting in the doubling of states that have passed regulations to add naturopathic doctors to their healthcare workforce. Reversal of established definitions without substantive cause is unfounded.

Naturopathic physicians are trained as primary care providers and play a critical role in chronic disease prevention, patient education, and integrative approaches that improve outcomes and reduce lifetime healthcare costs. Limiting financial access to naturopathic medical education will directly reduce the number of future clinicians entering the field, at a time when communities across the country are already experiencing severe shortages of primary care providers and the U.S. government is experiencing the financial burden of chronic disease. The cost to students is likely to increase with loans delivered by the private loan market.

As our colleagues in other health professions have also emphasized, **the nation will not meet its healthcare needs by narrowing the pipeline of qualified, licensed professionals**. Any federal policy that restricts loan access will exacerbate workforce shortages and limit patient access to safe, effective, team-based care.

The Department of Education is currently drafting rules, and is expected to release a Notice of Proposed Rulemaking before the end of the year. **The AANMC and AANP strongly urge the Department to include all health professions, including naturopathic doctors, in the framework of "professional degrees" before the final rule is released and in keeping with the last two decades of classifications.**

The AANMC and AANP are committed to working collaboratively with federal partners, higher education organizations, and interprofessional health profession associations to ensure that all accredited health profession programs—including naturopathic medical education—retain the resources necessary to train the next generation of clinicians. Protecting loan access is not only an educational priority; it is a public health imperative.

We will continue to update our community as this issue evolves and remain steadfast in advocating for a robust, equitable, and fully resourced healthcare workforce for all.

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AANMC & AANP
Advancing whole-person health. Strengthening the healthcare workforce. Supporting communities nationwide.

About the AANMC:

The Association of Accredited Naturopathic Medical Colleges (AANMC) represents the accredited naturopathic medical schools in North America and is dedicated to advancing naturopathic medical education and the profession's future workforce. AANMC supports high-quality, science-informed naturopathic medical training; fosters collaboration across institutions; and works to ensure that students, educators, and the healthcare system benefit from a strong and well-prepared naturopathic physician pipeline. Learn more at www.aanmc.org.

About the AANP:

The American Association of Naturopathic Physicians (AANP) is the professional association that represents licensed naturopathic physicians. The AANP strives to make naturopathic medicine available to every American and to increase recognition of naturopathic physicians as the identified authorities on natural medicine. Learn more at www.naturopathic.org.