



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

Medicaid Coverage of Naturopathic Physicians

Background

Recent studies conducted by the National Academies of Sciences, Engineering, and Medicine (NASEM) have succinctly outlined the benefits of taking a whole health approach to patient care, in particular *Achieving Whole Health: A New Approach for Veterans and the Nation* (1). Fully embracing the recommendations in this NASEM report on Whole Health would change the trajectory of patient care, improve patient outcomes, and decrease rising costs.

However, policymakers should also ensure that *all* licensed healthcare professionals who prioritize this kind of wellness approach are recognized, enumerated in statute, and eligible for insurance coverage - **especially government-sponsored medical coverage** - to support patient access to true preventive, whole-person, root-cause approaches to health restoration and wellness.

Naturopathic medicine, recognized by the National Institutes of Health and the World Health Organization as a distinct system of integrative health care, was lauded by Congress in 2014 through Senate Resolution 420 (2) as “safe, effective, and affordable health care; and encourages the people of the United States to learn about naturopathic medicine and the role that naturopathic physicians play in preventing chronic and debilitating illnesses and conditions.” The same resolution recognized that naturopathic medicine has been shown to lower the risk of major illnesses such as cardiovascular disease and diabetes, and that naturopathic physicians can help address the shortage of primary care providers in the U.S.

Naturopathic Doctors have postgraduate accredited education consistent to that of conventional medicine grounded in biomedical physiology and diagnostics, but with a re-prioritization of the order of therapeutics. Specifically, naturopathic medical training’s core therapeutic focus is on lifestyle-oriented self-care, preventive behaviors, physical activity, stress-management, clinical nutrition, herbal medicine, and hands-on manual therapies — only resorting to more-costly prescription drug therapies or surgical interventions when appropriate. Naturopathic Doctors (NDs) are regulated in 26 U.S. jurisdictions.

The Problem

All states are facing a dire shortage of healthcare workers, especially primary care providers. In late April 2024, CMS released a final rule that implements deadlines for Medicaid beneficiaries seeking primary care appointments (3), at a time when provider shortage is causing historically long delays in patients being able to see a doctor.

Further, only 6 jurisdictions that regulate naturopathic doctors include them in government-funded Medicaid programs. Lack of coverage by Medicaid leads to:

- Rural clinics or clinics whose primary populations are underserved can’t hire NDs.
- Clinics with high underserved populations that do hire NDs must use state or grant funding to cover services provided by naturopathic doctors, where Medicaid (or Medicare) would normally cover the same services provided by other healthcare practitioners.

To put it simply, Medicaid - and Medicare for that matter - are glaringly not utilizing educated, trained and licensed healthcare professionals, which further exacerbates the growing crisis in healthcare.



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Opportunities

- NDs are covered by Medicaid in: VT, WA, CT, OR, NM, and AZ⁽⁴⁾. These states provide examples of successful integration of NDs in Medicaid.
- Covering NDs in Medicaid helps address the workforce shortages in county health departments, community clinics, FQHCs, hospital out-patient and private clinics, with doctors who focus on prevention that reduces healthcare costs.
- **Clinics with NDs covered by Medicaid in Washington and Oregon alone care for hundreds of thousands of patients/year.** In Washington alone, there were over 450 NDs credentialed as Medicaid providers, serving over 21 rural and urban counties in the state in August 2023⁽⁵⁾. That number increased to 655 as of April 2024 as more Medicaid patients seek out Naturopathic Doctors.
- Expanding the number of primary care providers for Medicaid beneficiaries immediately improves Social Determinants of Health outcomes.

Legislative Ask

For Congress to help address the healthcare workforce shortage, by recognizing licensed Naturopathic Doctors as Medicaid providers and to require all states to follow the lead of the states who have already incorporated NDs into their healthcare system.

Specifically, to direct the Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) to authorize the Centers for Medicare & Medicaid Services (CMS) to require that states receiving federal Medicaid funding credential Naturopathic Doctors (NDs) and cover services provided by them for Medicaid patients, in jurisdictions where NDs are licensed.

References

1. National Academies of Sciences, Engineering, and Medicine. Achieving Whole Health: A New Approach for Veterans and the Nation. The National Academies Press; 2023. doi:10.17226/26854
2. <https://www.congress.gov/bill/113th-congress/senate-resolution/420/text?s=1&r=40>
3. <https://www.federalregister.gov/public-inspection/current>
4. Arizona is still in the process of integrating NDs into the Medicaid program, and only for pediatrics.
5. Washington Association of Naturopathic Physicians [Proposal to Increase Scope of Practice](#), August 2023