

March 2025

Integrative Care: Unlocking the Future of Patient-Centered Healthcare

Our public health system was built on the transformative principle of universal care—a value that has long defined our identity. Today, however, that system is stretched to its limits, and surveys show a growing concern among Canadians regarding its ability to meet our needs. This critical juncture calls for transformative thinking and a bold reimagining of healthcare.

Although the NDP holds a slim majority, the presence of a renewed government with many new faces alongside a robust opposition, creates multiple opportunities for naturopathic doctors to drive meaningful change. Naturopathic doctors are already expanding care options across the province by emphasizing prevention, healthy living, and personalized treatment for both chronic and acute conditions. This approach aligns directly with efforts to ensure every British Columbian has access to primary care and that the burden of chronic disease is addressed effectively.

The strain on emergency departments is evident and we hear regularly of ER closures across the province. Data from the Canadian Institute for Health Information reveals that one in seven emergency room visits between April 2023 and March 2024 were for conditions that could have been managed by primary care providers, with half of those visits occurring virtually. NDs are exceptionally positioned to meet this need by offering services such as prescribing medications, ordering routine lab tests, and providing comprehensive patient education. The integration of holistic and evidence-based care not only alleviates pressure on emergency services but also ensures patients receive the right care in the most appropriate setting.

The Ministry of Health's commitment to recruiting and retaining healthcare professionals, along with its efforts to redesign care systems, presents a timely opportunity to include naturopathic care as a key component of innovative solutions—especially in underserved and rural areas where comprehensive primary care is most needed.

Our role extends into mental health and addictions care as well. NDs contribute unique value through nutritional counseling, stress management, and lifestyle modifications, and—with prescribing authority—they can manage and monitor prescriptions effectively. These approaches complement other treatments and address both the physiological and psychosocial aspects of mental health, paving the way for seamless care systems that incorporate tailored recovery plans and transitional care.

In addition, the renewed focus on improving maternity, reproductive, and gynecological cancer care resonates with our expertise. British Columbia's recent pharmacare agreement, which promised funding for hormone replacement therapy, underscores the critical need to address women's health. NDs are well-versed in managing hormonal issues, safely prescribing HRT, and providing comprehensive care throughout menopause and other life stages. This ongoing care is vital for closing the gaps that leave many women without proper follow-up on abnormal test results or persistent symptoms—a service projected to benefit as many as 40,000 women.

With our province's population not only aging but also living longer and healthier lives, with care needs that continuously evolve, the demand for adaptive, efficient seniors' care is growing. NDs offer substantial support through preventive measures, chronic disease management, and lifestyle interventions that preserve dignity and independence while helping to reduce overall healthcare costs.

The call for collaboration within our healthcare system is stronger than ever. Integrated clinics where NDs work alongside physicians, nurses, and other professionals demonstrate how multidisciplinary teams can lead to improved outcomes and more cost-effective care. For this potential to be fully realized, education and policy reforms are essential—aligning regulations, expanding collaboration, and improving insurance coverage so that more British Columbians can access the care they deserve.

We invite you to follow our work at BCND and engage with our initiatives as we lead the way toward a stronger, more resilient future for universal care in British Columbia.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads 'V Lindsay'.

Dr. Vanessa Lindsay, BSc (Hons), ND

BCND Board President