

April 2025

Modern Regulation, Better Care: Advancing the Scope of Naturopathic Practice in BC

Background

Naturopathic doctors (NDs) in British Columbia are regulated healthcare professionals with extensive education in diagnosis, pharmacology, as well as clinical and integrative care. NDs are often the first point of contact for tens of thousands of patients and frequently serve in primary care roles that result in greater access to care for many across the province.

Despite this, BC’s regulatory framework does not currently reflect the full scope of ND training or the growing demand for accessible, team-based care. These limitations create unnecessary barriers for patients, increase pressure on other parts of the healthcare system, and contribute to fragmented service delivery. In turn, this fragmentation can compromise patient safety—delaying diagnoses, disrupting continuity of care, and increasing the likelihood of gaps in treatment or conflicting care plans. When access to timely primary care is constrained, more patients end up in acute care settings that are already overburdened. The cumulative effect is a system under significant strain, as seen in frequent emergency room closures, delayed surgeries, and provider burnout. Expanding the role of qualified, regulated professionals like naturopathic doctors is one way to help relieve this pressure and restore balance across the continuum of care.

BCND is taking steps to explore how the profession can more fully support patients, system capacity, and provincial health goals. This includes identifying areas where modernizing the scope of practice would allow NDs to deliver safer, more timely, and integrated care within an accountable regulatory framework. This accountable regulatory framework refers to a regulatory structure, through the College of Complementary Health Professionals of BC (CCHPBC), that ensures any scope changes are governed by clear standards, limits, and conditions; supported by profession-specific training requirements; and rooted in public safety, transparency, and system accountability.

Strategic Priorities Under Review

BCND is assessing a number of clinical areas where patients would benefit from enhanced access, and where ND training and safety standards already support the integration of such services:

- **Diagnostic Imaging:** Patients who need X-rays, ultrasounds, CT scans, or MRIs often face delays when NDs are required to refer out for requisitions. Allowing trained NDs to directly request imaging would streamline care, reduce duplicate visits, and accelerate diagnosis—especially for patients managing chronic or complex conditions.
- **Prescribing Medications:** While NDs are trained in pharmacology, current restrictions limit their ability to prescribe certain medications—even in situations where they are clearly appropriate, such as testosterone for hormone therapy, DHEA, PrEP for HIV prevention, or controlled substances for palliative care. Removing these limitations, with appropriate safeguards, would increase continuity of care and reduce patient handoffs.
- **In-Clinic Procedures:** NDs routinely support patients with conditions like chronic pain or erectile dysfunction but are currently unable to perform certain commonly accepted procedures (e.g., intracavernosal injections or therapeutic laser use). Authorizing trained NDs to provide these services would reduce wait times and increase access to non-invasive, evidence-based treatments.
- **Integrated Care Pathways:** NDs currently lack the authority to refer directly to medical specialists or community health services, which hinders care coordination. In some cases, they also face barriers in supporting patients through hospital transitions. Granting referral privileges and establishing appropriate care pathways would improve system navigation, reduce administrative burden, and ensure better follow-up care for patients.

Alignment with Health System Goals

The areas identified for review reflect a broader effort to align naturopathic practice with provincial priorities, including:

- **Expanding access to care, particularly in underserved communities:** By enabling NDs to utilize their full training, we can increase the availability of primary care services in areas where patients currently face significant barriers.
- **Reducing unnecessary bottlenecks and care delays:** Allowing NDs to perform certain diagnostic and therapeutic procedures can streamline patient care pathways, leading to more timely interventions and improved health outcomes.
- **Improving patient experience and continuity of care:** Enhancing the scope of NDs fosters a more integrated approach to patient management, reducing fragmentation and ensuring a more seamless healthcare journey.
- **Supporting collaborative, team-based models:** Incorporating NDs more fully into healthcare teams promotes interdisciplinary collaboration, leveraging diverse expertise to provide comprehensive patient care.
- **Addressing physician shortages with regulated, trained professionals:** Utilizing the skills of NDs helps mitigate the impact of physician and nursing shortages, ensuring that patients have access to qualified healthcare providers when and where they need them.

These objectives are in direct alignment with the [mandate letter](#) issued to the Minister of Health, which emphasizes the importance of expanding access to family doctors, recruiting and training more health professionals, and ensuring that every British Columbian can access the care they need, no matter where they live in the province.

Responsible Planning and Engagement

BCND recognizes that changes to scope of practice must be grounded in strong planning, collaboration, and regulatory oversight. The relatively recent formation of the College of Complementary Health Professionals of BC (CCHPBC) in June 2024 through amalgamation presents a valuable opportunity for greater alignment and shared learning across professions.

As part of this broader regulatory framework, we are working closely within the CCHPBC environment to identify areas where existing standards, limits, and conditions (SLCs) can be harmonized across professions. If a particular procedure or activity is already safely performed by one group of practitioners under CCHPBC oversight, there is a clear and logical pathway to extend that authority—where appropriate—to other regulated professionals, such as naturopathic doctors, with similar competencies and appropriate training.

This collaborative approach ensures both regulatory consistency and efficient system design, without compromising public safety.

Current planning activities include:

- Mapping training standards and implementation pathways across CCHPBC-regulated professions
- Identifying shared areas of practice where scope enhancements can be supported by existing regulatory infrastructure
- Engaging with professional colleagues and CCHPBC leadership to align on public interest goals
- Collecting case studies, patient data, and evidence to support decision-making
- Reviewing scope models from other jurisdictions to inform safe and scalable approaches

By working in alignment within the amalgamated regulatory structure, BCND is committed to advancing responsible, evidence-informed changes that strengthen care delivery while ensuring the public interest remains at the centre of all decisions.

Conclusion

As British Columbia works to strengthen its healthcare system, naturopathic doctors are ready to contribute more fully to the care of patients across the province. With a solid foundation of training, a clear track record of safe and effective care, and growing demand from both patients and communities, NDs are well-positioned to help close access gaps, support team-based models, and alleviate pressure on other parts of the system.

By modernizing outdated scope limitations and leveraging the collaborative environment created through the formation of CCHPBC, we can take a thoughtful, phased approach to ensuring that naturopathic doctors are working to their full potential within a clear, accountable, and harmonized regulatory framework.

BCND remains committed to working constructively with government, regulators, and healthcare partners to support this evolution. Expanding the role of NDs is not only a pragmatic step toward improving care—it's an opportunity to build a more responsive, efficient, and inclusive healthcare system for all British Columbians.