

Briefing Note

Assembly of First Nations (AFN)
Attention: Jenny Gardipy, Senior Policy Analyst
Re: Resolution no. 97/2023

January 31, 2025

Non-Insured Health Benefits (NIHB) Coverage for Naturopathic Medicine

Background:

Per resolution 97/2023 the First Nations-in-Assembly directed AFN to, in part, advocate for the Government of Canada to amend the NIHB to include coverage for services provided by naturopathic doctors and to engage in dialogue with relevant government authorities to include naturopathic services within the publicly funded healthcare system.

Analysis:

Naturopathic Doctors (NDs) are important partners in health and key members of comprehensive healthcare teams, providing safe, effective, and potentially cost-saving care. Currently, access to NDs is restricted to people who can afford private healthcare or have separate health benefit plans. These economic barriers to healthcare marginalize the most vulnerable. At CAND, we believe everyone deserves equal access to healthcare that supports them today and toward a healthier tomorrow. Evidence supports the addition of naturopathic care as a path to better outcomes.

Naturopathic care is an important and effective tool in combatting the many health crises affecting Indigenous Peoples. “Heart disease rates for Indigenous people are as much as 50% higher than in the general Canadian population, and the death rate from stroke is twice as high.”¹ It is unacceptable that resources exist to reduce this risk but are inaccessible. Naturopathic medicine has been proven effective in reducing the risk of cardiovascular disease (CVD) which in turn creates cost-savings.^{2,3} “A naturopathic approach to CVD primary prevention significantly reduced CVD risk over usual care [...] and reduced costs to society...”³ Naturopathic care recipients had “a reduced adjusted 10-year cardiovascular risk [...] and a lower adjusted frequency of metabolic syndrome [...]”.²

There is a recognized connection between chronic pain and poor mental health.⁴ Taking a holistic approach to patient care, naturopathic care has proven effective and economical in addressing chronic pain. In a study on the use of naturopathic care for chronic lower back pain; “Naturopathic care [...] significantly improved quality-adjusted

life-years [...and] significantly reduced societal costs by \$1212 per participant.”⁵
Reducing downstream health risks is both a lifesaving and cost-saving measure.

The rate of diabetes for Indigenous Peoples is also disproportionately high. “First Nations on reserve have a rate of diabetes three to five times higher than that of other Canadians.”⁶ “There is a substantial body of research including systemic reviews, observational studies and clinical studies supporting naturopathic care for Type 2 diabetes.”⁷ In a study on patient-reported experiences using naturopathic care for Type 2 diabetes found “[t]hree themes characterized the nature of the ND-Patient interaction: 1) patient-centered, 2) holistic health rather than diabetes focused, and 3) collaborative.”⁸ These are not simply characteristics of effective care, they are a foundation for culturally sensitive care.

Recommendation:

Naturopathic care should be included as part of the healthcare framework provided to Indigenous Peoples through the NIHB and additionally included more broadly in the publicly funded healthcare landscape in Canada.

About the CAND:

The Canadian Association of Naturopathic Doctors (CAND) is the national professional association representing over 2,500 naturopathic doctors (NDs). Our members are highly trained healthcare professionals. They pursued an undergraduate degree before entering a four-year, full-time, naturopathic medical program accredited by the Council on Naturopathic Medical Education and have passed an entry-to-practice qualifying examination (NPLEX). The CAND publishes the peer-reviewed journal CANDJ (candjournal.ca) in support of scientific research and evidence-informed practice; and vigorously supports professional regulation of naturopathic medicine across Canada in the interest of public protection.

Contact:

Gemma Beierback CAE, CEO Canadian Association of Naturopathic Doctors
ceo@cand.ca

*References on following page

References:

1. Helping to close the gap in Indigenous health. Heart&Stroke. Accessed January 29, 2025. <https://www.heartandstroke.ca/what-we-do/our-impact/helping-to-close-the-gap-in-indigenous-health#:~:text=Heart%20disease%20rates%20for%20Indigenous,a%20state%20of%20health%20crisis.>
2. Seely D, Szczurko O, Cooley K, et al. Naturopathic medicine for the prevention of cardiovascular disease: a randomized clinical trial. *CMAJ*. 2013;185(9):E409-E416. doi:10.1503/cmaj.120567 [Naturopathic medicine for the prevention of cardiovascular disease: a randomized clinical trial - PubMed](#)
3. Herman PM, Szczurko O, Cooley K, Seely D. A naturopathic approach to the prevention of cardiovascular disease: cost-effectiveness analysis of a pragmatic multi-worksite randomized clinical trial. *J Occup Environ Med*. 2014;56(2):171-176. doi:10.1097/JOM.0000000000000066 [A naturopathic approach to the prevention of cardiovascular disease: cost-effectiveness analysis of a pragmatic multi-worksite randomized clinical trial - PubMed](#)
4. Chronic pain linked with poor mental health: Statistics Canada January 29, 2015 Accessed January 29, 2025 <https://ontario.cmha.ca/news/chronic-pain-linked-poor-mental-health-statistics-canada/#:~:text=Through%20a%20detailed%20analysis%20of,69%20percent%20versus%2079%20percent>
5. Herman PM, Szczurko O, Cooley K, Mills EJ. Cost-effectiveness of naturopathic care for chronic low back pain. *Altern Ther Health Med*. 2008;14(2):32-39. [Cost-effectiveness of naturopathic care for chronic low back pain - PubMed](#)
6. Diabetes. Diseases that may affect First Nations and Inuit communities: Diabetes. June 8, 2021. Accessed January 29, 2025. <https://www.sac-isc.gc.ca/eng/1569960595332/1569960634063>
7. WNF White Paper – Naturopathic Workforce and Type 2 Diabetes by World Naturopathic Federation WNF Issuu_Accessed January 29, 2025 [WNF White Paper - Type 2 Diabetes by World Naturopathic Federation WNF - Issuu](#)
8. Oberg EB, Bradley R, Hsu C, et al. Patient-reported experiences with first-time naturopathic care for type 2 diabetes. *PLoS ONE*. 2012;7(11). doi:10.1371/journal.pone.0048549 [Patient-Reported Experiences with First-Time Naturopathic Care for Type 2 Diabetes | PLOS ONE](#)
9. Naturopathy, practice, effectiveness economics & safety by World Naturopathic Federation WNF – Issuu. Accessed January 29, 2025 https://issuu.com/worldnaturopathicfederationwnf/docs/naturopathy_practice_effectiveness_economics_s