



Naturopaths &  
Medical Herbalists  
of New Zealand (Inc)

## Position Statement: Differences between Naturopaths, Natural Medicine, Complementary Medicine and Integrative Medicine Practitioners and Health Coaches

### Background

The terms 'natural medicine', 'integrative medicine', 'complementary medicine' and 'health coach' have been used interchangeably at times with the term 'naturopathy' contributing to public confusion and naturopathic identity issues. These terms are **not** equivalent and are sometimes used by qualified and unqualified practitioners alike in promotion of their clinical practice.

Currently in New Zealand (NZ) there is no government legislation that regulates use of the terms 'natural medicine', 'integrative medicine', 'complementary medicine', 'health coach' or 'naturopath' by any person, trained practitioner or otherwise. When consulting a naturopath, it is essential that you can verify that they are, in fact, a qualified 'naturopath' as it is not illegal in NZ to call yourself one, even without a qualification.

Practitioners who are appropriately qualified naturopaths should be members of the naturopathic professional association - *Naturopaths and Medical Herbalists of New Zealand Inc* (NMHNZ) which is the only professional association in NZ solely representing qualified naturopaths. The practitioner will refer to themselves as a *naturopath*, display their naturopathic qualification and any other *bone fide* qualifications they claim, NMHNZ membership certification and the "Health and Disability Service - Your Rights" which provides detail for formal complaint in full vision. Members of NMHNZ abide by the organisation's *Scope of Practice* and *Code of Conduct* policies available on the organisation's website <https://naturopath.org.nz>. Complaints about a practitioner who is a member of NMHNZ can also be made direct to the organisation (see the website for details).

Naturopaths may have a diploma or bachelor's degree depending on when and where they trained and whether they have upgraded their qualification since graduating. Currently the highest standard of training in NZ is a three-year bachelor's degree offered by institutions accredited to deliver such programmes with the NZ Qualifications Authority (NZQA). As of January 1<sup>st</sup> 2021, all new NMHNZ professional members will be required to hold a three-year bachelor's degree in naturopathy. Standards are being increased in accordance with the aims of the World Naturopathic Federation

(WNF), and by end of 2025, all new members will require a four-year bachelor's degree bringing NZ training in line with Australian naturopathic qualifications. NMHNZ has recently adopted standards and competencies of the *Australian Register of Naturopaths and Herbalists* (ARONAH) which aims to provide professional trans-Tasman accreditation of programmes offered by NZ colleges, in addition to NZQA accreditation, in the near future. This will require each college to undertake a process of candidacy as they work towards full accreditation of their naturopathic programme.

Prospective students should be aware of this increase in standards to:

1. ensure that their qualification will provide for membership with NMHNZ upon graduation.
2. understand that only colleges that hold and agree to maintaining the highest education standards in NZ can be educational members of the WNF.

NMHNZ is the only professional association representing naturopaths in NZ and is the only professional NZ member of the WNF, the international organisation representing the global naturopathic profession <http://worldnaturopathicfederation.org> . Naturopathic colleges that are members of WNF are listed here: <http://worldnaturopathicfederation.org/educational-members>

Sometimes practitioners who are not qualified naturopaths refer to their treatments as naturopathic therapies. However, naturopathy is not a therapy, it is a distinct medical system with philosophical roots from European traditional medicine and American eclectic medicine, combined with modern bioscience. Naturopathy is person-centred and whole systems-focused, taking account of the whole person and their interrelationship with family, community and environment. Naturopathic services align with World Health Organisation goals of universal coverage for disease prevention, health promotion, recovery, rehabilitation and palliative care (1).

Naturopathic treatment is defined by underlying principles and not individual therapies, namely the healing power of nature (*vis medicatrix naturae*), treat the whole person (*tolle totum*), treat the cause (*tolle causam*), first do no harm (*primum non nocere*), naturopathic doctor as teacher (*docere*) and health promotion and disease prevention (2).

Therapeutic interventions are based on both scientific and traditional evidence and follow what has been termed “the therapeutic order”, initially supporting self-healing bodily processes where achievable; when not, pathological suppression is used to alleviate suffering, risk or harm to the patient's health and may include both naturopathic and medical care (3). NMHNZ urges consumers and naturopathic practitioners alike to be transparent with medical providers in terms of the delivery and receipt of naturopathic care.

Naturopathic care includes nutritional counselling, dietary supplementation, herbal medicines (including aromatherapy), lifestyle counselling, hydrotherapy, homeopathy, physical therapies/massage and mind-body therapies. In geographical regions outside NZ, jurisdiction may include acupuncture, yoga, intravenous therapies and pharmaceutical prescription (4).

### **Definition of key statements**

**Mainstream medicine** - A system in which medical doctors and other healthcare professionals (such as nurses, pharmacists, and therapists) treat symptoms and diseases using pharmaceutical drugs, radiation, or surgery.

**Natural medicine** – is a term that can have multiple meanings. It can refer to the use of a non-mainstream therapy (i.e. massage, reflexology) or medicine (dietary supplement, herbal medicine, homeopathic medicine) used in isolation by mainstream medicine and allied health professionals in a medical context that is disease focused, as opposed to being part of a naturopathic approach to whole person health care based on a naturopathic philosophical viewpoint. Natural medicine practitioners may or may not be formally qualified in non-mainstream practices utilised.

**Complementary medicine** – refers to practice of non-mainstream healthcare used in conjunction with conventional medicine. A complementary medicine practitioner may or may not be formally qualified and may or may not have undertaken a programme of training from a government accredited educational institution. <https://www.nccih.nih.gov/health/complementary-alternative-or-integrative-health-whats-in-a-name>

**Integrative medicine** - generally holds mainstream medicine central, applying isolated therapies or natural medicines in a medical context (disease-focused) based on scientific evidence, although there are various types of integrative medicine, depending on philosophy, structure and process adopted be it parallel, consultative, collaborative, multidisciplinary, interdisciplinary or truly integrative (5).

### **Types of integrative medicine**

**Parallel** – is characterised by individual health care practitioners (i.e. medical doctor and naturopath working in a common setting applying their own scope of practice, while keeping each other informed).

**Consultative** – is where one medical expert provides advice to another medical expert (i.e. doctor and naturopath) within a consultation (i.e. letter) or other form of communication.

**Collaborative** – like parallel, each practitioner practices separately but collaborates, sharing information in the treatment of a patient, frequently in an ad hoc manner.

**Co-ordinated** – occurs when there is a formalised administration structure and sharing of patient records, with each practitioner operating as part of a team.

**Multidisciplinary** – managed by a team leader that plans patient care with independent practitioners (i.e. massage therapist, naturopath, hypnotherapist, medical doctor).

**Interdisciplinary** – is where a range of practitioners work together as a team with face-to-face communication to design and manage patient care.

**Integrative** – is truly integrated when there is interdisciplinary collaboration that blends both mainstream health care with naturopathic in a manner that is non-hierarchical, whole person, patient-centred care that supports a body's innate healing capacity, promoting wellness and disease prevention.

**Integrative health** – refers to integrative medicine that has been expanded to include allied health professionals, who are not medical doctors (e.g. nurses, physiotherapists, chiropractors, osteopaths etc.).

**Health coach** – has been described as a mentor, much like a personal trainer. Certification courses are usually short, potentially 3 -6 months from start to certification, usually online and frequently from unaccredited institutions. Health coaches provide basic knowledge on eating, exercising, resting and stress management to avoid ill health <https://www.learnhowtobecome.org/health-coach> .

## References

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5. Boon H, Verhoef M, O'Hara D, Findlay B. From parallel practice to integrative health care: a conceptual framework. BMC Health Services Research. 2004;4 (15).