

# WHITE PAPER: NATUROPATHIC WORKFORCE AND TYPE 2 DIABETES

**This White Paper is for policymakers and healthcare practitioners to inform them of the essential role that the naturopathic workforce can have in the management and treatment of Type 2 diabetes.**

Type 2 diabetes is a common non-communicable disease (NCD) with global prevalence estimated to reach 10% by 2030 [1]. It is a condition defined by elevated blood glucose, with associated insulin resistance and insulin deficiency.

Type 2 diabetes increases cardiovascular mortality risk by 2 – 3-fold, thus further amplifying the leading cause of death worldwide. If global targets under the World Health Organization (WHO) Global Action Plan for the Prevention and Control of Noncommunicable Diseases are not met, estimates suggest Type 2 diabetes alone will cost the global economy \$2.1 trillion, or up to 2.2% of the global GDP, by 2030 [2].

Similar to other NCDs, the risk of Type 2 diabetes is strongly associated with modifiable risk factors – underlying stress and depres-

sion, lifestyle behaviours, physical activity, sedentarism, obesity, dietary choices, and environmental exposures – all which are addressed as part of naturopathic care [3].

## Key Messages

1. The naturopathic workforce has a long history in working with patients with Type 2 diabetes.
2. The naturopathic workforce are experts in assessing the causes of Type 2 diabetes and in lifestyle management.
3. There is a substantial body of research including systematic reviews, observational studies and clinical studies supporting naturopathic care for Type 2 diabetes.
4. Most consumers include Traditional and Complementary Medicine (T&CM) therapies, products and practices as part of their personal and family healthcare regimen.

**The World Naturopathic Federation (WNF) represents naturopathic organizations around the world with the aim of promoting, supporting and enhancing the global naturopathic profession.**

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*Traditional and complementary medicine (T&CM) is an important and often underestimated health resource with many applications, especially in the prevention and management of lifestyle-related chronic diseases, and in meeting the health needs of the ageing populations.*

Foreword from WHO Global Report on Traditional and Complementary Medicine 2019 [4]

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## The naturopathic workforce has a long history in working with patients with Type 2 diabetes.

Overview of international cross-sectional study in 14 countries of naturopathic practice and patient characteristics revealed that the naturopathic workforce provides health-care for Type 2 diabetes in patients belonging to different age groups [5].

- Three of four patients that visit the naturopathic workforce have an NCD. Type 2 diabetes is one of the key NCDs treated by the naturopathic workforce [5].
- Patients with chronic diseases who were visiting different practitioner groups indicated that they were the most satisfied with the services they received from naturopathic practitioners [6].
- Patients with Type 2 diabetes specifically reported naturopathic care was person-centered, whole-person health-focused, and synergized with their other health care [7].

## The naturopathic workforce are experts in assessing the causes of Type 2 diabetes and in lifestyle management.

- The naturopathic lens is well-suited to complex conditions with its focus on complexity, addressing multiple causative factors and physiological systems concurrently [3].
- The naturopathic profession has been a significant contributor to person-focused nutrition for Type 2 diabetes, including consideration of modern biomedical concepts such as the impact of psychiatric health on eating behaviors, and the role of microbiome on health [3].
- A strength of the naturopathic profession is that it addresses lifestyle factors as an integral part of practice. Naturopathic practitioners support informed decision making and address diet, activity level, breathing, stress management, alcohol and smoking behaviours, environmental pollutant exposure and other aspects of healthy living as part of their general treatment strategy for Type 2 diabetes [3].
- 98% of the naturopathic workforce engage in community education and health promotion activities, hence they are well-suited to play a more formal role in public health initiatives aimed at increasing health literacy [8].

## **There is a substantial body of observation studies, clinical studies and other forms of research supporting naturopathic care for Type 2 diabetes including:**

- Naturopathic practice-based guidelines for Type 2 diabetes are consistent with WHO guidelines, as well as, risk factor reductions (i.e., average glucose and blood pressure) during the course of naturopathic care [9, 10].
- Clinical trials of adjunctive naturopathic care demonstrated risk factor reduction (i.e., average blood glucose), as well as; improvements in diet, physical activity, and self-management. Importantly, trials have also demonstrated improved self-efficacy and reduced stress and depression in patients during naturopathic care [11 – 13].
- Naturopathic practitioners have published recommendations for the clinical use of natural health products with evidence to support their benefit in the treatment and management of Type 2 diabetes [14].
- Research of international practice models of naturopathy and yoga suggest benefits for the treatment and management of Type 2 diabetes [15].

## **Most consumers include Traditional and Complementary Medicine (T&CM) therapies, products and practices as part of their personal and family healthcare regimen.**

According to the WHO, 88% of countries report the use of Traditional and Complementary Medicine (T&CM) therapies, products and practices [4].

- Naturopathic care is known for its diverse and flexible therapeutic approach to healthcare. It is individualized to each patient using a range of therapeutic modalities and practices [3].
- There is a growing trend for individuals to choose herbal remedies, vitamins and minerals as part of their healthcare regimen, especially when treating chronic concerns [17].
- It is common for the naturopathic workforce to perform or prescribe four or more different naturopathic therapeutic modalities or practices during a naturopathic visit with the most common being applied and clinical nutrition, lifestyle modifications, and herbal medicine [5].
- Naturopaths / naturopathic doctors provide healthcare for diverse chronic and acute conditions throughout all stages of life and support patients seeking preventive and palliative care. The naturopathic workforce is an untapped health resource to address high burden health conditions, such as Type 2 diabetes, both as primary care practitioners and collaboratively with other healthcare professionals [3, 16].

# Overview of Naturopathy

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According to the Health Technology Assessment on Naturopathy: [3]

- Naturopathy is a traditional system of medicine originating in Europe that is now part of T&CM around the world as naturopathy or naturopathic medicine.
- Naturopathy is defined by two philosophies and seven principles and naturopathic care is guided by distinct naturopathic therapies.
- As of 2021, there is a naturopathic workforce in over 108 countries, and it is estimated that the naturopathic workforce sees over 5.5 million patients globally per month.
- Naturopaths / naturopathic doctors provide healthcare for diverse chronic and acute conditions throughout all stages of life and support patients seeking preventive and palliative care. The naturopathic workforce is an untapped health resource to address high burden health conditions such as non-communicable diseases both as primary care practitioners and collaboratively with other healthcare professionals.
- Naturopathic practice is complex and multi-modal and incorporates core naturopathic therapies, modalities and practices including applied nutrition, clinical nutrition, herbal medicine, lifestyle modifications, mind-body medicine techniques, naturopathic physical medicine, hydrotherapy and other therapies based on jurisdictional regulations and level of education.

For more information contact the World Naturopathic Federation at [info@worldnaturopathicfederation.org](mailto:info@worldnaturopathicfederation.org) or visit our website at [worldnaturopathicfederation.org](http://worldnaturopathicfederation.org)



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