

WHITE PAPER: NATUROPATHIC WORKFORCE AND NON-COMMUNICABLE DISEASES (NCDs)

This White Paper is for policymakers and healthcare practitioners to inform them of the essential role that the naturopathic workforce can have on the management and treatment of NCDs.

Non-communicable diseases (NCDs) are the leading cause of death and disability worldwide and are a tremendous burden on the global healthcare system [1, 2]. The United Nations estimates that the NCDs could cost the global economy \$47 trillion by 2030 if the current trend is not addressed [3].

NCDs include a range of conditions including arthritis, asthma, most cancers, chronic obstructive pulmonary diseases, diabetes, cardiovascular diseases, endocrine and gastrointestinal conditions, kidney diseases, mental health conditions, neurological conditions, skin diseases and a range of other chronic diseases. The risk of NCDs is strongly associated with modifiable risk factors – lifestyle behaviours, physical activity, sedentariness, obesity, alcohol consumption, dietary choices, and environmental exposures – all which are addressed as part of naturopathic care [4].

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

Key Messages

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

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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 [9]

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The naturopathic workforce has a long history in working with patients with NCDs.

A recent international cross-sectional study in 14 countries of naturopathic practice and patient characteristics revealed that the naturopathic workforce provides healthcare for a diverse range of NCDs in patients in different age groups [5].

- Three of four patients that visit the naturopathic workforce have an NCD. The most common NCDs treated by the naturopathic workforce include musculoskeletal conditions, gastrointestinal conditions and mental health disorders. Other NCDs commonly treated by the naturopathic workforce include hypertension, Type II Diabetes, cancer, and endocrine disorders [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].
- The naturopathic profession has been instrumental in the development of integrative oncology, nutritional psychiatry, as well as modern biomedical concepts such as the role of microbiome on health [4].

The naturopathic workforce are experts in assessing the causes of NCDs.

- The naturopathic lens is well-suited to complex conditions with its focus on complexity, addressing multiple causative factors and physiological systems concurrently [4].
- A strength of the naturopathic profession is that it addresses lifestyle and environmental 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 all NCDs [4].

- 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 [7].

There is a substantial body of research supporting naturopathic care for NCDs.

- The international naturopathic research community has demonstrated sustained commitment to codifying and synthesizing existing knowledge, generating new knowledge, and disseminating this knowledge to the wider clinical and research community. The naturopathic profession has been increasingly engaged with evidence-based medicine since it was articulated in 1996 [4].
- Naturopathic researchers have published over 350 reviews and meta-analyses on various NCDs including reviews on mental health (n=81), cancer (n=67), musculoskeletal (n=51), gastrointestinal (n=39), women's health (n=39), neurological (n=25), cardiovascular (n=21), endocrine (n=17), infectious (n=12), respiratory (n=10), skin conditions (n=9), weight management (n=8), among other conditions (n=12). These reviews and meta-analyses provide a comprehensive understanding of the evidence to support the role of naturopathic care in a range of NCDs [4].
- In the past thirty years, naturopathic researchers have published over 360 observational studies on a range of NCDs including cancer (n=113), musculoskeletal health (n=55), mental health (n=52), neurological condition (n=43), women's health (n=44), urogenital conditions (n=24), cardiovascular health (n=21), infectious disease (n=17), endocrine conditions (n=15), weight management (n=15), gastrointestinal conditions (n=13), wellness and preventive health (n=11), respiratory health (n=8), among other conditions (n=9). The observational studies provide a look at the etiology, progression and management of health conditions using naturopathic care [4].

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- 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 [4].
- 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 [8].
- 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 [3].

Overview of Naturopathy

According to the Health Technology Assessment on Naturopathy: [4]

- 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 or visit our website at worldnaturopathicfederation.org



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