



June 13, 2018

Dr. Matt Collins
Director of Medical Policy and Clinical Integration
Blue Cross & Blue Shield of Rhode Island
500 Exchange St.
Providence, RI 02903

Re: Insurance Coverage for Services Provided by Naturopathic Doctors

Dear Dr. Collins:

Greetings! The American Association of Naturopathic Physicians (AANP), the national professional association representing licensed Naturopathic Physicians, wholeheartedly encourages Blue Cross & Blue Shield of Rhode Island to consider covering medical services provided by Naturopathic Physicians, also known as Naturopathic Doctors (NDs). Providing insurance coverage for ND services increases patient access to health care that is, in the words of the U.S. Senate, "[safe, effective, and affordable](#)."¹ There are many compelling reasons to cover ND services:

- **Naturopathic medicine is a distinct primary health care profession** emphasizing prevention, treatment, and optimal health through the use of therapeutic methods that encourage and promote the body's inherent healing process. The practice of naturopathic medicine combines time-tested techniques with the rigors of modern science and evidence-based research. NDs attend four-year, in-residence medical programs at institutions recognized by the U.S. Department of Education and accredited by the Council on Naturopathic Medical Education (CNME). CNME is the only national accrediting agency for programs leading to the Doctor of Naturopathic Medicine (ND or NMD) or Doctor of Naturopathy (ND) degree that is recognized by the U.S. Secretary of Education.
- **NDs focus on prevention and advancing patient wellness**, providing many of the same services that are provided by MDs, but with a focus on prevention and addressing the root cause of illness. NDs are experts in integrative, patient-centered health care with the express purpose of keeping people well. Conditions such as obesity, diabetes, chronic pain, cardiovascular disease, anxiety, and depression are treatable and, in many cases, preventable with naturopathic medicine.

¹ US Senate Resolution 420, agreed to unanimously Sep. 18, 2014.

- **Naturopathic medicine is proven to be effective and cost-effective.** One study that reviewed the efficacy and cost-effectiveness of integrative medicine estimates that changes in lifestyle and stress reduction – a major focus of naturopathic medicine – could save the US \$10 billion annually in reduced coronary angioplasty procedures and coronary bypass operations alone, and result in insurance savings of almost \$30,000 per patient.² Another recent study showed that one year of care under the supervision of an ND resulted in a 3.3% reduction in 10-year cardiovascular disease event risk.³ In a country with ever-increasing rates of chronic disease and preventable illnesses, investing in naturopathic medicine is a smart choice.
- **Naturopathic medicine is demonstrably safe.** The Rhode Island legislature wisely passed legislation to license NDs in 2017, and licensed NDs bring an impressive record of safety to Rhode Island. Seven of the jurisdictions that regulate Naturopathic Doctors report zero disciplinary actions over the past five years, and malpractice insurance costs are low, with premiums for NDs nearly 5 times lower than premiums for MDs.⁴ Expanding access to the safe medical services that NDs provide makes sense for patients.
- **NDs excel at chronic pain management and can be an important part of the solution to the opioid crisis ravaging the country.** At a time when opioid abuse is at crisis level nationally, patients in Rhode Island would benefit from having covered access to a licensed profession that offers non-invasive, non-toxic and non-addictive treatment for chronic pain. Naturopathic medicine is that profession. Along with medical professionals from other disciplines, naturopathic doctors are actively engaged in collaborative efforts to solve America’s opioid problem. This includes participating in working groups to develop better pain management practices and modify national prescribing habits to limit the overuse of opioids. One example is the policy brief for the PAINS project, “Never-Only Opioids: The Imperative for Early Use of Non-Pharmacological Approaches and Practitioners in Pain Care.”⁵ NDs played a leading role in the development and dissemination of the brief.

In conclusion, providing insurance coverage for NDs enhances access to safe, effective, and cost-effective naturopathic medical services in Rhode Island and will benefit patients, the community, and the state. I would be glad to answer any questions you may have, and I can be reached directly at 202.237.8150, ext. 103.

Thank you very much for your time and consideration.

Sincerely,



Laura Farr
Executive Director

² See Guarneri E, Horrigan, BJ, Pechura, CM. 2010. The Efficacy and Cost-Effectiveness of Integrative Medicine: A Review of the Medical and Corporate Literature. Bravewell Collaborative Report. June, 2010.

³ See Seely S, Szczuko O, Cooley K, et al. Naturopathic medicine for the prevention of cardiovascular disease: a randomized clinical trial. CMAJ 2013; DOI:10.1503/cmaj.120567.

⁴ 2016 [Federation of Naturopathic Medicine Regulatory Authorities](#) survey.

⁵ See <http://painsproject.org/wp/wp-content/uploads/2014/09/pain-policy-issue-5.pdf>.