

SCOPE OF PRACTICE – NATUROPATHS

AAFP Position

The AAFP [believes](#) that naturopathic theory and practice are not based upon knowledge widely accepted by the scientific community. Naturopathic education does not prepare practitioners to properly and accurately diagnose or provide appropriate treatment, safely or effectively prescribe medications, perform physicals for school or employment, or perform surgical procedures. The AAFP opposes the expansion of naturopaths' scope of practice in states that provide licensing for naturopaths. In states that do permit licensure of naturopaths, the Academy opposes any expansion of their scope of practice that is not supported by naturopathic education and training. A naturopath must not be allowed, under any circumstances, to use the title "physician," nor should a naturopath be considered a "primary care physician."

Education and Training

There are significant differences between family physicians and naturopaths in both training and education. Family physicians receive their education through a four-year degree program at one of the 192 accredited allopathic or osteopathic medical schools in the United States. Students must pass the Medical College Admissions Test (MCAT) for entrance into medical school and spend nearly 9,000 hours in lectures, clinical study, lab, and direct patient care.

Most family medicine residency programs require three years of clinical training and have specific requirements that must be met, such as a demonstrated competency in diagnosis and management and direct experiences in patient care, before students are eligible for board certification. Residency programs are designed to provide integrated experiences in ambulatory, community and inpatient environments over three years of concentrated study and hands-on training.

Naturopathic education is completed through a four-year degree program that confers a Doctor in Naturopathy (ND) or Doctorate in Naturopathic Medicine (NMD). Currently, there are only seven naturopathic education institutions in the United States. These schools do not require an entrance exam, such as the MCAT or Graduate Records Examination (GRE), for admission.

Naturopathic instruction totals 4,100 hours which includes coursework in areas such as homeopathy, botanical medicine, and psychology and requires at least 1,200 hours of clinical education, with a minimum of 850 hours in direct patient care. Graduates of naturopathic degree programs are not required to undergo the same post-graduate residency training expected of medical school graduates; however, some naturopathic institutions offer an optional one-year residency program.

Regulation and Scope of Practice

The regulation of the practice of naturopathy varies from state to state. Florida, South Carolina, and Tennessee explicitly prohibit the practice of naturopathy,¹ while 22 states and DC have laws that license naturopaths.² To receive a license to practice naturopathic medicine in those states, naturopaths are required to graduate from an accredited four-year residential naturopathic school and

¹ American Naturopathic Certification Board. (2021). "Review of State Laws Regulating Naturopathy." Web.

² American Association of Naturopathic Physicians. (2021). "Regulated States and Regulatory Authorities." Web.

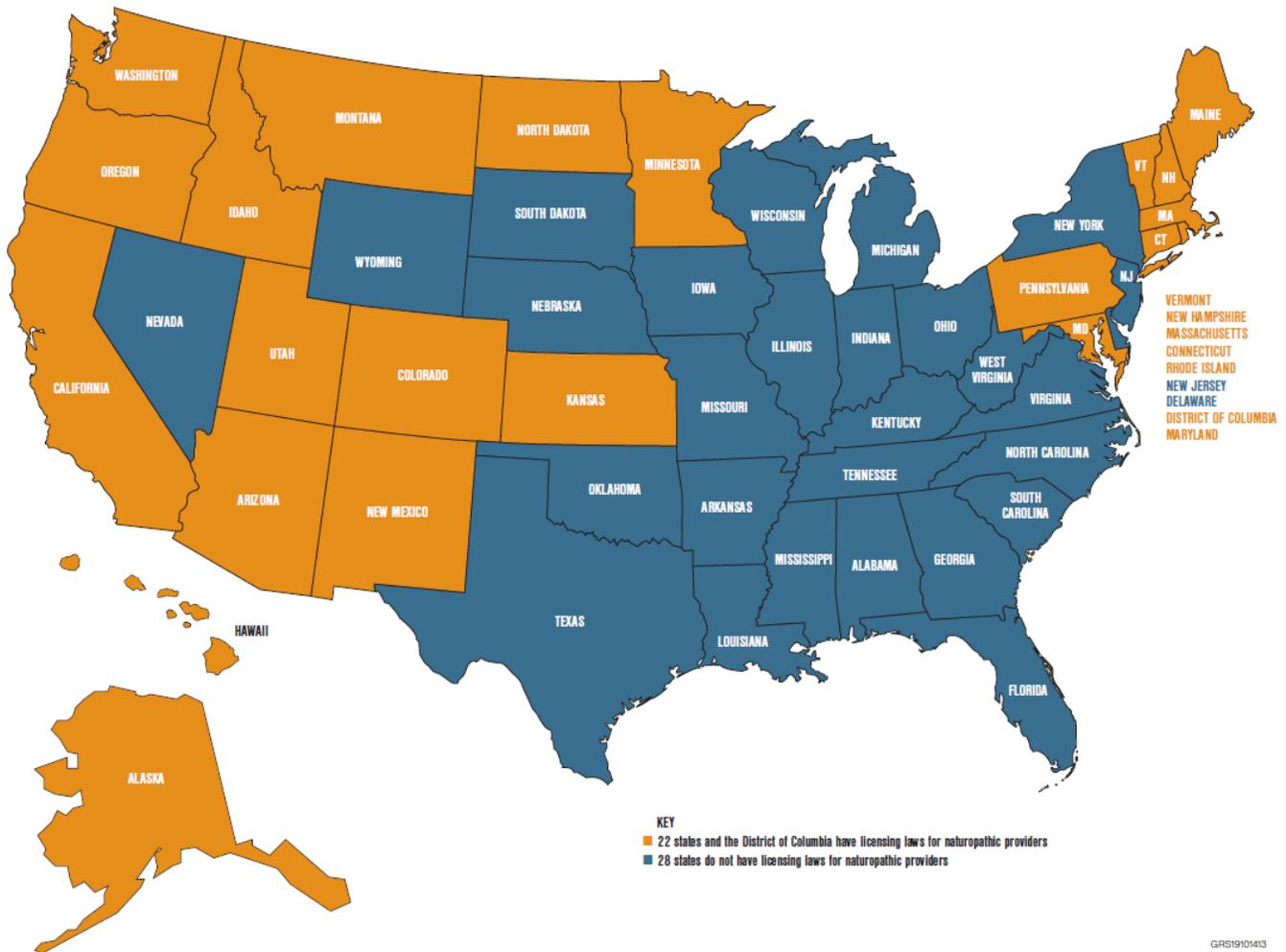
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pass a postdoctoral board examination. Licensed naturopaths must fulfill state-mandated continuing education requirements annually and follow a specific scope of practice defined by their state’s law.



State laws regarding the practice of naturopathy address prescribing authority, surgical authority, the ability to order tests, and use of the term “physician.” While most of these states allow for naturopaths to have prescribing authority, they are not allowed to prescribe controlled substances aside from New Hampshire, New Mexico, and Washington, which allow limited exceptions for certain drugs, often “natural medications.” Most states with naturopaths allow them to prescribe and administer nonprescription natural therapeutic substances, drugs, and therapies.

Aside from prescribing authority, the extent of what licensed naturopaths can do differs widely among states. Fourteen states (CA, CO, HI, ID, KS, ME, MN, MA, MT, NH, NM, OR, UT, VT) and DC allow naturopaths to provide some minor surgeries. While definitions of minor surgeries vary, they typically refer to the repair, care and suturing of superficial lacerations and abrasions and the removal of foreign bodies located in superficial tissue. Additionally, 13 states (CA, CO, ID, MA, MD, ME, MN, MT, ND, NH, NM, UT, VT) allow naturopaths to order diagnostic tests. Finally, nine states (AZ, HI, ID, MA, MT, NM, OR, UT, VT) allow naturopaths to use the term “physician;” however, this is expressly prohibited in seven states (AK, CA, CO, KS, MD, ME, ND) and DC.¹

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¹ “State law chart: Naturopathic licensure and scope of practice.” (2018). *American Medical Association*. Web.