

# House Bill 91: Alaska Naturopathic Health Care Reform

## Problem

Alaska law severely limits the scope of practice for licensed naturopathic doctors, preventing them from providing care that is standard to their training and practiced commonly in other U.S. states. These limitations serve to:

- Unnecessarily restrict practice by fully qualified primary care practitioners.
- Require costly duplicative services.
- Limit access to healthcare - particularly in rural areas.

## Solution

HB91 establishes a clear scope of practice for naturopathic doctors which reflects their education and training. Among other things, the bill allows licensed practitioners to perform minor office procedures (examples include sutures, wart removal, IUD placement and removal), and issue vitamins, minerals and non-controlled substance prescription medications.

## Rationale

- Allowing naturopathic doctors to practice the full scope of their training will increase the number of primary care providers in Alaska. This will **improve healthcare access and address the shortage of primary care providers in the state.**
- The recommended changes reflect the actual training and qualifications of naturopathic doctors, who **graduate from accredited 4-year medical programs with more than 4,000 hours of training and clinical rotations.**
- Removal of overly restrictive regulations means **patients can access their medications** from their primary care provider **without the need for duplicative appointments and costs.**
- Naturopathic doctors' primary focus is on disease prevention, rather than symptom and medication management, helps provide **good quality of life and positive health outcomes for patients over time.** In the long-run, this type of care **saves money for consumers, insurers and the state.**
- In Alaska, naturopathic doctors have a **more limited scope of practice than other healthcare providers in Alaska with equal or lesser training,** though naturopathic doctors practice safely under the complete scope in many other states.
- Major health care networks, like the Providence system, include naturopathic physicians in their integrative health care models in other states.
- Regulating naturopathic doctors appropriately will **encourage more young practitioners to move to Alaska** and serve Alaskans. Naturopathic doctors qualify for Indian Health Service's national loan repayment program aimed at increasing access health care access in remote Alaska, but are unable to make use of this program due to the limited scope of practice.