



FAQ for the Media

Why is registration for naturopaths and Western herbalists an important public health issue?

Naturopaths and herbalists are now an integral part of the Australian healthcare system and form Australia's largest complementary medicine professional group. Approximately half of Australians consult with complementary medicine practitioners and approximately 1 in 6 utilise them as their primary care practitioners. Australians rarely discuss this use with their conventional healthcare providers. Due to the ongoing popularity of naturopathy and Western herbal medicine, minimum educational and practice standards are required of these practitioners to ensure public safety and promote best practice.

Does the profession support registration?

Yes, the limited data that has been collected suggests that practitioners in naturopathic and herbal medicine professions do support independent registration. Registration is also supported by peak medical groups, public health bodies and other health professions.

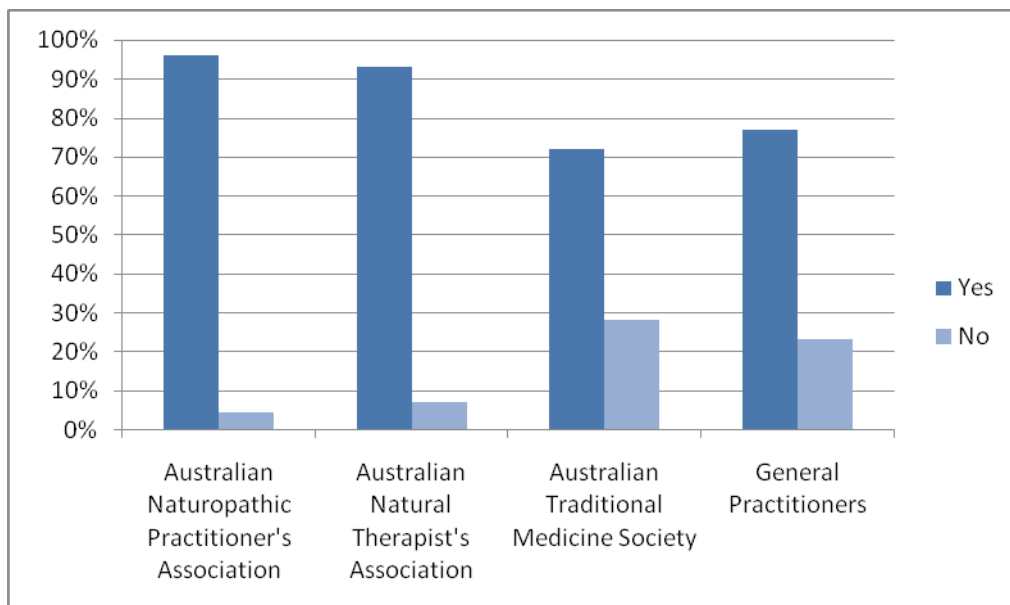


Table 1: Support for registration of naturopaths and western herbalists by individual practitioner members of various professional groups.



Why haven't naturopaths and Western herbalists been registered yet?

Naturopaths have been previously registered in the Northern Territory. The federal Mutual Recognition Act 1992 superseded this territory-based legislation and due to the low numbers of practitioners in the territory new replacement legislation was not drafted. The Victorian government initiated an investigation in 2003 into the registration of naturopaths and herbalists as part of its aim of improving public safety and raising the standards of complementary medicine practitioners following the implementation of the Chinese Medicine Registration Bill 2000. The report, entitled *The Practice and Regulatory Requirements of Naturopathy and Western Herbal Medicine* was published in 2005 and strongly recommended that these professions be statutorily regulated (a copy of the report is available in the links section). The implementation of statutory regulation in Victoria was delayed indefinitely in deference to the broader federal National Registration and Accreditation Scheme for Health Professionals. Naturopaths and Western herbalists will be considered for inclusion in the national registration scheme when the process examines unregulated health practitioners. This process may take some time and the current register is designed to protect public safety in the interim and be ultimately subsumed by the broader national registration scheme if and when naturopaths and western herbalists are included.

Are naturopathy and herbal medicine registered anywhere else?

Yes, there is a definite trend towards registration. Naturopaths are currently licensed by the government in 19 US states and territories and 6 Canadian Provinces. Seven more US states and all remaining Canadian provinces and territories are pursuing registration. In the United Kingdom where herbalism is a more common profession moves are currently underway to develop statutory registration for that profession. Naturopaths and herbalists in other jurisdictions including New Zealand, South Africa, Germany and India are either already registered or it is being actively pursued.

Shouldn't the professional associations register members?

The naturopathic and herbal medicine professions are currently self-regulated largely through the professional associations but standards such as minimum education requirements and complaints handling processes vary considerably. Professional associations do an excellent job of promoting and advocating for their professions but a conflict of interest arises when an organisation is trying to protect the interests of both the public and the profession. Whilst this arrangement has not been tested in Australia it has been legally tested and failed in other jurisdictions – such as South Africa – where it was mandated that registration of health professions such as naturopaths and herbalists needed to be carried out by an organisation independent of the profession.



Where can I find more information?

This issue has been explored at some depth by a variety of means. The information on this FAQ has been sourced from documents available in the media links.