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SUBMISSION ON PROPOSED INDEPENDENT NATUROPATHIC AND HERBALISTS REGISTER

The Southern School of Natural Therapies would like to offer its support for The Australian Register of Naturopaths and Herbalists. The School believes that a national guideline and registration body for naturopathic practitioners is an important step towards securing the growth of the profession, and guaranteeing that the public receive the best possible services and care. As outlined in the La Trobe report, the greatest risk associated with naturopathic practice is that posed by under or unqualified persons practicing. This risk would be removed if a national regulatory body were set up. There would also be more accountability within the profession, giving the public and the government one body to deal with, instead of several professional associations as is current the case. The fact that ARONAH would be an independent body also nominates its creation as a valuable step forward for naturopaths and herbalists.

Having a national register such as ARONAH would in turn make practitioners' and the public's dealing with health funds much more straightforward. Instead of individual practitioners having to provide proof of qualifications to each health fund the funds can be guaranteed of their meeting a certain minimum level of competency by the fact that they are members of ARONAH. This would in turn mean that practitioners would be more willing to gain provider numbers from smaller health funds, as the application process would be simplified. Consequently, members of the public insured by these lesser known funds would not miss out on their cover.

The creation of ARONAH would also help expedite the inclusion of naturopathy and herbal medicine in the government's national registration process which is currently underway. This initiative would show that the profession is able to regulate itself effectively, and would provide a solid starting point for the government's register.

The Southern School sees ARONAH's ultimate ability to guarantee the public a minimum level of qualifications for registered practicing naturopaths as one of its most valuable contributions. Currently the highest undergraduate qualification available is a four year bachelor degree, and the School would consider this to be the goal for a minimum qualification standard. Of course, there would be a need for some kind of grandfathering to accommodate the transition period. There are a number of ways in which this can be dealt with, such as an assessment of practicing naturopaths based on the number of years they have practiced in recent times, or a challenge exam, or completion of an upgrade course, or a combination of the above. There would also be a need to enforce the maintenance of these qualifications and the up keep with modern trends and new science and standards. This could be achieved through a CPE requirement for registration renewal.

Other considerations which need to be taken into account include the process adopted for the selection of board members, and what expertise these members need to possess. Naturally, the school would expect that the bulk of the members would be practicing naturopaths and herbalists. There would also be a need for members with an education background and involvement in the academic world, as well as members with legal expertise, and general health and community professionals. There would also be an expectation that the board would accredit tertiary providers' naturopathy and herbal medicine courses, and as such some of the board members would also be examiners.

By providing a national code of ethics and setting minimum practice and qualification standards for the naturopathy and herbalist professions ARONAH would allow the health-care services provided by these professions to become more widely and effectively utilised by the public. If there is one body to deal with, the public can be assured of the legitimacy of their chosen practitioner as long as they are registered with this body. Individual practitioners would also benefit from the many advantages of being part of a recognised professional body.



Colin Thomson
Principal