

February 2, 2022

RE: Support of OR House Bill HB4006 of 2022; Equal reimbursement for naturopathic practitioners

My name is Kristin Testa, and I am a registered nurse, as well as a student at OHSU and a registered voter in the state of Oregon. I urge you to vote yes on OR HB4006. If passed, this bill would require independent and group insurance policies to reimburse naturopathic physicians, acting within the scope of their practice, at a rate equal to that which licensed physicians would receive when providing the same or comparable services. Your actions to support the passage of this bill will give Oregonians more choice in their healthcare and support the efforts of naturopathic physicians in improving the health of Oregonians. Healthcare isn't a one-size-fits-all approach. Passage of this bill will allow Oregonians to have access to all of the available healthcare options, so that they can find the treatment approach that works best for them.

According to the Oregon Association of Naturopathic Physicians (OANP) (n.d.), Naturopathic physicians (NDs) in Oregon are licensed and trained to provide primary care services that are comparable to those provided by medical doctors (MDs) and other providers, such as nurse practitioners (NPs) and physician's assistants (PAs). However, private insurers pay naturopathic doctors as little as 50% of what they pay to other providers (Clark, 2021). According to data from the Kaiser Family Foundation (2020), Oregon has a shortage of primary care providers. NDs in Oregon can act as primary care providers, and fill in that shortage gap, but while many insurance companies may reimburse care provided by NDs, it is usually classified as alternative or complementary care, instead of primary care. Most insurance carriers set limits on the covered amount that they will reimburse for these "alternative and complementary" services, limiting patient access to these services.

It is important to provide Oregonians with as many options as possible to help them optimize their health. The western medicine approach doesn't work for every patient, or every ailment. Sometimes it is helpful to take a more holistic, natural approach, and to look at the body as a whole. After a decade of struggling with the uncontrolled symptoms of a chronic illness myself, with no relief or benefit from western medicine, I took a different approach. I began working with a naturopathic provider, who looks at all aspects of my health and wellness including nutrition, sleep, mental health, physical activity and lifestyle, along with helping me to manage my chronic illness. She monitors my labs, orders tests, and refers me to other providers as needed. Having the ability to prescribe western medicines and natural remedies, she allows me more choices regarding my treatments. After a year of working with a naturopathic provider, my lab work and my overall sense of wellbeing showed that my chronic illness was finally under control and in remission. I believe that all Oregonians should have as many options as possible in regard to their health and their medical care.

In 2013, House bill 2902 was signed into law requiring insurance companies to reimburse Nurse Practitioners and Physicians assistants, at the same rates that would be paid to licensed physicians for the same services (Legiscan, 2013). Naturopathic physicians are providing the same services, and more, as NPs, PAs, and MDs and they too deserve to be equally reimbursed for these services. The care provided by Naturopathic Physicians takes a more holistic approach, focused on overall health, improved quality of life and preventative care. Naturopathic physicians partner with their patients, providing patient-centered care which improves the patient experience and increases the overall value of that care. Ensuring equal reimbursement for Naturopathic physicians, will support sustainable practices for NDs to ensure that they can continue their efforts to improve the health of Oregonians. Please support the passage of HB4006.

One argument in opposition pay parity for NDs, is that it will increase healthcare expenses for private insurance carriers (Clark, 2021). Naturopathic physicians play a critical role in providing healthcare to Oregonians including primary care services. These same services would be reimbursed fully if the patient were to be seen by an MD, so the overall cost should not change. Primary care services, including those provided by NDs, can help to improve overall health, to prevent illness and disease and to treat illnesses earlier, possibly preventing costly hospital services (Healthy People, 2021). The care provided by naturopaths can help to keep Oregonians well and improve the health of individuals, and the population, which can decrease the overall healthcare costs.

A second argument against pay parity for NDs, is that the amount of education required for NDs is less than that required for MDs, and that the reimbursement should reflect this. The education required for NPs and PAs is also much less than that which is required for MDs (Saarzynski & Barry, 2019). However, as mentioned earlier, in 2013 legislation was passed requiring equal reimbursement for services provided by NPs and PAs (Legiscan, 2013). The payment should reflect the services provided, not the education of the provider.

Naturopathic physicians in Oregon are trained and licensed to provide primary care services, and we should allow NDs to practice to the fullest extent of their license. NDs can help to provide needed primary care services to Oregonians to improve their health and wellness. OR House Bill HB4006 will ensure that Oregonians have access to these services. Healthcare is not a one-sized-fits-all approach. Oregonians should have access to as many healthcare options as possible, to find the approach that works best to meet their individual needs. Again, I urge you to vote yes on Oregon House Bill HB4006, during the upcoming legislative session.

Thank you for your time, and for your support of HB4006.

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References

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