



American Association of Naturopathic Physicians

## **Naturopathic Medicine Lowers Health Care Costs**

### *Cost-Effectiveness Research*

Naturopathic medicine is a disruptive innovation with the potential to transform health care as an effective model of primary care that is less dependent on costly drugs and technological intervention, and also explicitly promotes improvements in health. It can reduce the need for expensive medical care by promoting health and decreasing the need for many medical interventions.<sup>1</sup>

### **Naturopathic Medicine Can Help Reduce High-Cost Chronic Diseases**

According to the CDC, 90% of our nation's \$4.1 trillion in annual health care expenditures are for people with chronic and mental health conditions. However, **preventing or managing chronic diseases can help lower these costs.**

**Depression** is another chronic condition that is not well treated by currently available drugs, that drastically reduces health-related quality of life, and that carries an estimated economic cost in excess of US \$210 billion annually, with 50% of these costs attributable to work place losses.

- Yoga and St. John's Wort, two low-cost naturopathic approaches for depression, have been extensively evaluated for depression and concluded to be effective and safer compared to drug therapy. Yoga has been specifically evaluated in the workplace and appears efficacious for depression, including in employees with chronic pain.<sup>1</sup>

**Type 2 diabetes** is a costly drain on the health care system, with estimates from the United States suggesting diabetes and its complications costs in excess of \$400 billion per year, or approximately one of every three health care dollars spent.

- Low-cost therapies typically recommended in naturopathic practice, including yoga, omega-3 fatty acids, cinnamon, chromium, and carbohydrate reduction, all have robust clinical trial support for efficacy in reducing clinical risk factors in type 2 diabetes.<sup>1</sup>

**Cardiovascular disease**, or heart disease, is the leading cause of death for men, women, and people of most racial and ethnic groups in the United States. Heart disease costs the United States about \$363 billion each year from 2016 to 2017. This includes the cost of healthcare services, medicines, and lost productivity due to death.

- In a study on naturopathic medicine for the prevention of cardiovascular disease, the cost of naturopathic treatment (lifestyle modification) was significantly less than conventional care (metformin drug therapy). For each quality-adjusted life years (QALY) saved, **a lifestyle modification program costs \$8,800 while metformin therapy costs \$29,000.** Additionally, the

lifestyle modification program was shown to be cost-effective in all adults, while metformin was not cost-effective after age 65.<sup>2</sup>

- Another study concluded that **naturopathic medicine reduced the risk of cardiovascular disease**. These risk reductions came with **average net study-year savings of \$1,138 in societal costs and \$1,187 in employer costs**.<sup>3</sup>

### **Naturopathic Physicians Offer Less Expensive Treatment Than Those in Conventional Medicine**

Numerous studies have demonstrated that using non-invasive, non-toxic approaches lowers health care costs.<sup>3,5</sup> Patients with the greatest disease burden show the most significant reduction in total medical expenditures when utilizing integrative medicine.<sup>6</sup>

- 55% of patients reported a slight to substantial reduction of their use of conventional medical care once they begin visiting an integrative medicine provider.<sup>7</sup>
- A systematic review of randomized clinical trials found that use of natural health products has the potential to reduce costs compared to conventional treatment by up to 73%.<sup>8</sup>
- Many studies have also documented cost savings resulting from use of naturopathic medicine to reduce pain, especially back pain.<sup>9,10,11</sup>

### **Naturopathic Medicine Decreases Prescription Drug Costs**

Many studies have found that naturopathic care results in substantially lower prescription drug costs than conventional care. Naturopathic physicians are also much less likely to use prescription medications as treatment, even when these drugs are included in their scope of practice. They typically prescribe botanical or nutritional supplements to effectively care for medical problems rather than expensive prescription drugs.

- Patients who received intensive lifestyle modification and naturopathic therapy for type II diabetes improved all health scores in just one year (lipid levels, body fat percentage, etc.) and decreased medication requirements compared to those on standard therapy.<sup>12</sup>
- Integrative medicine users in two studies reported significantly lower prescription drug use of 48% and 61%, respectively.<sup>7,13</sup>

### **Naturopathic Physicians Offer True Disease Prevention, Thus Reducing Expensive Ongoing Care**

By addressing the root cause of disease, naturopathic physicians reduce the need for repeated, expensive and often ineffective symptomatic treatment.

- A study published in *JAMA* found that patients of integrative medicine providers were significantly more likely to have obtained common preventive services, including pap smears, cholesterol testing, influenza immunizations, and breast exams.<sup>14</sup>
- A study found that patients receiving one year of care under the supervision of a naturopathic

physician experienced a 3.1% reduction in 10-year Cardiovascular Disease event risk compared to patients receiving conventional care. They were also 16.9% less likely to have developed metabolic syndrome.<sup>15</sup> **This resulted in significant savings to society of \$1,138 per patient and to employers of \$1,167.**<sup>3</sup>

### **Naturopathic Care Reduces Employee Sick Days and Cost, while Improving Productivity**

- Employees of the Canadian Postal Service receiving naturopathic care for low back pain or heart disease showed reductions in lost workdays and improvements in productivity while at work.<sup>16</sup> These improvements in workplace productivity actually made naturopathic medicine a cost-savings approach with a real *return-on-investment*.
- Vermont Auto Dealers Association's use of **naturopathic care for employees saved \$2.10 in medical costs for every dollar spent, and \$8.20 in total costs per employee for every \$1 spent.**<sup>17</sup>

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