



Canadian Alliance of Regulatory Bodies of Traditional Chinese Medicine
Practitioners and Acupuncturists

Alliance canadienne des organismes de règlementation des praticiens de la médecine
traditionnelle chinoise et des acupuncteurs

August 8, 2023

Honourable Mark Holland
Minister of Health
Health Canada
Address Locator 0900C2
Ottawa ON K1A 0K9
hcminister.ministresc@hc-sc.gc.ca

Dear Minister Holland,

Re: Natural Health Products Fee Proposal

Thank you for the opportunity to submit feedback on the fee proposal for natural health products (“NHP”) as part of the current consultation period extended to August 10, 2023.

The Canadian Alliance of Regulatory Bodies of Traditional Chinese Medicine Practitioners and Acupuncturists (“CARB”) is the national forum and voice of provincial regulatory authorities that are established by their respective provincial legislation. The founding members comprise the regulatory bodies of [Traditional Chinese Medicine Practitioners and Acupuncturists](#) (“TCM/A”) of British Columbia, Alberta, Ontario, Quebec, and Newfoundland and Labrador.

Based on our review of the proposed changes to the regulatory fees for NHPs, we would like to bring to your attention several consequences to the public if the fee schedule as presented is adopted.

Affordability

We note in the [Minister of Health Mandate Letter](#), dated December 16, 2021, that the federal government continues to be concerned with “the recovery of a strong middle class” following the system-wide impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic. Inflationary pressures continue to impact Canadians and their ability to access necessary health and wellbeing supports.

Increasing the fees for regulation of NHPs as proposed, even with a mitigation strategy for small business owners, will necessarily mean higher costs for patients to access the products they need to maintain good health. This may, in turn, drive consumers to seek non-compliant, unregulated products from outside of Canada, and to do so without consulting health care providers who are informed about the uses, benefits, and risks of NHPs. This will increase the likelihood of adverse outcomes for consumers, decrease viable solutions for care, and increase pressure on the public health care system.

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Patient Access to Care

Also outlined in the Minister of Health Mandate Letter is a commitment to “continue to address the profound systemic inequities and disparities that remain present in the core fabric of our society, including our core institutions. To this effect, it is essential that Canadians in every region of the country see themselves reflected in our Government’s priorities and our work.”

While CARB supports the regulation of NHPs in the manner in which the Standing Committee on Health recommended in their report, [Natural Health Products: A New Vision](#), to ensure the safety of patients and consumers, increasing the regulatory fees for NHPs as proposed may have the unintended consequence of limiting access or eliminating from the Canadian marketplace many NHPs, especially those highly-specialized, historically established NHPs used in the treatment of TCM/A patients.

As a result, TCM/A Practitioners, who were deemed essential service providers across provincial jurisdictions during the COVID-19 pandemic, may no longer have access to certain treatment options for their patients and this, in turn, will limit a patient’s right to choose and access to care. This is particularly concerning in that the changes to NHP regulatory fees will inordinately affect certain cultural populations that rely more heavily on traditional medicines. In the context of TCM/A, Canada’s Asian population, which, according to [Statistics Canada](#), represents approximately 17% of the population and could represent 55.7% to 57.9% of all immigrants entering the country by 2036, will be heavily impacted by lack of affordability and lack of access to TCM treatments.

Strengthening the Health Care System

Finally, the Health Minister Mandate Letter highlights the importance of strengthening “our universal public health care system and public health supports” as well as advancing “an integrated, comprehensive, and patient-centric strategy.”

Increasing the regulatory fees for NHPs as proposed may, instead, place a greater burden on our existing health care system. Integrative health care professionals, such as TCM/A Practitioners, play a key role in providing essential services by alleviating pressures on the health care system. They provide preventative and chronic care support to the [millions of Canadians](#) who access alternative or complementary health care each year. This keeps these patients out of physicians’ offices, pain clinics, and urgent care facilities. It also reduces the use of pharmaceuticals, further lowering patient risk and costs for the public health care system.

The impacts of increasing regulatory NHP fees on product affordability and a patient’s access to care, as outlined above, may result in fewer patients accessing this type of care and an increase in patients with urgent or advanced health issues entering an already overburdened public care system.

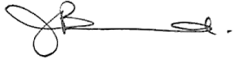
Additional Consultation

In closing, we would encourage Health Canada to engage in broader consultation on the fee increase proposal prior to implementing any changes, including with the regulatory bodies tasked with overseeing the health care professions that administer NHP treatments.

Prior consultation on the regulatory framework for NHPs was conducted by Health Canada and this resulted in current regulations that appropriately differentiate NHPs from pharmaceuticals. In a similar vein, we encourage Health Canada to re-evaluate the proposed fee schedule in the context of the potential public impacts noted above as well as with attention to the differences between the pharmaceutical and NHP industries that necessitate a diverse approach to the regulation of their products. Adopting a fee structure similar to that for human drugs and medical devices, as noted in the [current consultation](#), may not take into account these fundamental differences.

CARB would be happy to participate in such a consultation and would welcome further discussion on the issues presented in this letter. Once again, we appreciate the opportunity to submit our feedback and look forward to hearing from you.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Jennifer Bertrand", with a horizontal line extending to the right.

Jennifer Bertrand
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