

American Association of Naturopathic Physicians

Licensable Naturopathic Doctors vs. Unlicensable Naturopathic Practitioners

The American Association of Naturopathic Physicians (AANP) advocates formal licensure of Naturopathic Doctors (NDs) in all 50 states. This type of regulation provides transparency, protects public health, and provides greater health care options for patients. Licensure enables patients and medical professionals to distinguish between qualified, Licensable Naturopathic Doctors and Unlicensable Naturopathic Practitioners who have much less or no formal training.

Licensable Naturopathic Doctors are experts in natural medicine who are trained as primary care physicians. They attend four-year, doctoral level medical degree programs that are accredited by the Council on Naturopathic Medical Education ([CNME](#)), an accrediting agency [recognized by the U.S. Department of Education](#). Medical schools offering accredited ND programs are members of the Association of Accredited Naturopathic Medical Colleges ([AANMC](#)). Licensable Naturopathic Doctors work in tandem with other health care professionals and, as specialists in preventing and resolving chronic illness, constitute a critical component of a comprehensive health care system. **Unlicensable Naturopathic Practitioners** do not attend schools with regional or programmatic USDOE recognized accreditation. While they may utilize some of the same therapies as Licensable Naturopathic Doctors, the education and training they receive is fundamentally different and often completed online. The table below compares naturopathic medicine programs at AANMC member schools to correspondence programs at Trinity School of Natural Health and the University of Natural Medicine, two of the more popular online programs:

	AANMC Member Schools	Trinity School of Natural Health	University of Natural Medicine
Accredited by agencies recognized by United States Department of Education?	YES	NO	NO
Bachelor's degree from an accredited institution required for admission?	YES	NO	NO*
Average length of program	4+ years	Self-paced; average 1-1.5 years	Self-paced; average 2-4 years
Total program tuition and fees	\$112,000-146,000	\$4,195-4,495	\$10,000-14,000
In-residence or correspondence program?	In-residence	Correspondence	Correspondence
Minimum contact hours or credits required for graduation	4,100 hours	133 hours*	120 credits (1,800 study hours)
Minimum clinical hours required for graduation	1,200 hours	0	20-40 hours
Graduates eligible to sit for the NPLEX exam (administered by NABNE)?	YES	NO	NO
Graduates eligible for licensure in states that regulate Naturopathic Doctors?	YES	NO	NO

*Sources: University of Natural Medicine Admissions Office (4-21-2017) and <http://universityofnaturalmedicine.org/>; institute requires a Bachelor's degree for admission to the ND program, but it does not have to be from an accredited school. Trinity Admissions Office (4-24-2017) and <https://www.trinityschool.org/>; correspondence course offered in book or video format; 133 hours of video, + a manual and a test for each of 48 course modules. aanmc.org.

It is essential for patients and prospective patients to know that anyone who presents himself or herself as a licensed “doctor” or “physician” has the necessary qualifications, by virtue of his or her education and training, to merit the title. It is a matter of **consumer awareness, public health and safety, and transparency**. All health care practitioners should be able to practice to the full scope and extent of their training, skills, and abilities – and, as outlined above, those are fundamentally different for Unlicensable Naturopathic Practitioners vs. Licensable Naturopathic Doctors. Patients should be informed about the level of care they are choosing, and it is in every patient’s best interest to have maximum choice when selecting a health care provider. Further, regulation ensures practitioners meet the appropriate standard of care for their profession and provides clear recourse for patients, should those standards not be met.