

Report from the Chair

Mark Fontes, ND



Dear Members,

One of the key functions of the CAND, and one our members consistently advise is the most important to them, is advocating on behalf of the profession with the federal government. As a small health professional organization, this can sometimes seem a daunting task. However, with the advice of our government relations experts H+K and under the direction of our Director of Government Relations, Shawn O'Reilly, the CAND Government Relations Committee has made significant progress on behalf of the profession over the years. Persistent outreach for engagement has resulted in the CAND being a respected stakeholder with various government ministries and directorates, such as the Ministry of Health, Finance Ministry, Veterans Affairs Canada (VAC), and the Natural and Non-Prescription Health Products Directorate (NNHPD). As a stakeholder, the CAND has participated in numerous advisory committees, scientific review panels, and consultations providing advice and submissions from the profession's perspective. During the pandemic, the CAND was the only complementary and alternative medicine (CAM) organization invited to be a member of the Public Health Agency of Canada (PHAC) Allied Health Advisory Table, which resulted in naturopathic doctors (NDs) being recommended by PHAC to assist with community health.

We are very grateful to all the NDs across Canada who have represented the profession on various committees when the government has asked the CAND for input—consultations on Lyme disease, the opioid crisis, and revisiting the Canada Food Guide to name a few. By successfully taking part in these consultations and discussions, our profession can participate in future issues that significantly impact the health of Canadians while aiding the reach of our individual practices.

Engaging with the federal government is by its very nature a long-term commitment as governments and bureaucrats change, resulting in the need to raise awareness with new people and build new relationships. Perseverance is key to success in government relations. For example, our recent announcement that NDs were added to the VAC list of healthcare professionals approved to provide services to Veterans was the culmination of seven years of work with three successive governments, various Ministers of Veterans Affairs, Members of Parliament, senior bureaucrats and policy advisors. Retroactive to June 1, 2022, Veterans are now able to claim a maximum amount per year for naturopathic consultations and assessments (in line with the Public Service Health Care Plan policy for naturopathic care). This is an important first step and has opened the door to our continued engagement with VAC to secure coverage for a list of services NDs can provide to Veterans.

Over the same time period, the CAND has been advocating for coverage of naturopathic services for Indigenous peoples under the Non-Insured Health Benefits Program, a request supported by many Indigenous communities. Our success with VAC will help us move forward with Indigenous Services Canada on this important ask. We will be reaching out to members shortly via a survey to gather relevant information on the care NDs are providing to Indigenous people to include in our discussions and submissions. In addition to ongoing work with VAC and Indigenous Services Canada, the CAND has prepared, or is preparing, submissions on the marketing of products containing CBD, the review of the *Cannabis Act* and its regulations, and the consultation on exceptions to the Prescription Drug List. We will report on these and other initiatives in a future report.

Dr. Mark Fontes, ND, is Chair of the Canadian Association of Naturopathic Doctors.

Correspondence to: Mark Fontes c/o Shawn O'Reilly, Canadian Association of Naturopathic Doctors, 20 Holly Street, Suite 200, Toronto, ON M4S 3B1, Canada.
E-mail: soreilly@cand.ca

To cite: Fontes M. Report from the Chair. *CAND Journal*. 2022;29(4):3. <https://doi.org/10.54434/candj.129>

Received: 07 November 2022; **Accepted:** 07 November 2022; **Published:** 15 December 2022

© 2022 Canadian Association of Naturopathic Doctors. For permissions, please contact candj@cand.ca.