

British Columbia's Changing Regulatory Landscape—Challenges and Opportunities

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British Columbia (BC) is in the midst of a shift to the healthcare regulatory landscape. This change to regulation was initiated several years ago, and many across the country are likely familiar with the gist of this transition. This shift has two main components. First, the number of BC's regulatory colleges was reduced, including the amalgamation, on June 28, 2024, of the former College of Naturopathic Doctors of BC to the College of Complementary Health Professionals of BC (CCHPBC), which includes our colleagues in Traditional Chinese medicine, registered massage therapy, and chiropractic care. Second, the former *Health Professions Act* will be replaced by the passed, but not yet enacted, *Health Professions and Occupations Act*.¹

For several years the BC Government has signaled to health professions a strong desire to implement recommendations arising from a commissioned report in 2018 referred to as the Cayton Report.² Comprehensive in its scope, the Cayton Report recommended reducing the number of regulatory colleges and updating the *Health Professions Act* of 2005 to enhance the protection of the public, focus on greater transparency, and improve the complaints process.

In answer to these recommendations, the new *Health Professions and Occupations Act* (HPOA or the Act) passed its third reading in the Legislative Assembly of BC on November 24, 2022, and received Royal Assent the same day. The final approved HPOA moved swiftly and with rapid consultation through the review and legislative process. Its numerous provisions represent significant changes to the regulation of health professions in BC. These include but are not limited to:

- A reduction in the number regulatory colleges, which included several newly amalgamated colleges
- A restructured discipline and complaints process
- A focus on and commitment to cultural safety and humility
- Changes to information sharing and transparency amongst the regulatory colleges and other agencies in the name of public safety and protection
- A competency-based, as opposed to profession-based, Board appointment model for regulatory college Boards of Directors

While the new HPOA has passed into law, it remains unclear when full implementation will occur, and government has yet to confirm its timelines publicly. The newly amalgamated colleges will need to prepare for the new Act while also navigating the complexities of joining diverse health professions into condensed entities—no easy feat. Underscoring this complexity is that CCPHBC enacted its first set of bylaws in June 2024 to facilitate amalgamation, but a further set of bylaws will need to be written for the new HPOA. While the regulatory colleges prepare for these steps, government has also moved forward with implementation, notably by naming the Superintendent, Sherri Young, who will lead the Office of the Superintendent of Health Professions and Occupations Oversight. The new Office has several functions, but its primary role is to ensure regulated health profession colleges under the new Act are accountable in the public interest.

British Columbia's Naturopathic Doctors (BCND) has taken a dual-oriented approach to understanding and staying on top of news and information as it relates to the HPOA by using legal expertise, collaborating with health association colleagues through a group known as the Healthcare Associations of British Columbia, inviting government officials to speak to the collaborative group of healthcare associations, and joining forces with other groups to strategize ways forward given all of BC's regulated health professions share similar concerns about the new HPOA. These shared concerns focus on the lack of collaboration and rapid consultation when developing the new Act as well as significant concerns with respect to the disciplines and complaints process, use of titles, potential privacy and human rights issues, and the costs of implementation and how these costs may be passed on to our respective memberships. At the heart of the work of BCND is our membership. We have heard members' concerns and have been consistently impressed with the passion that NDs in our province have demonstrated in understanding a very complex Act, replete with uncertainty. BCND will continue to centre the "voice" of NDs in navigating our new regulatory landscape.

Concerns notwithstanding, it remains important that NDs also consider the opportunities presented by the new HPOA and the amalgamation of colleges. NDs have been working closely with

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our health professional colleagues and are taking a strong leadership role in understanding aspects of the Act and how it may impact healthcare delivery in BC. By working with colleagues and by taking an interprofessional approach to understanding the issues, NDs are situating themselves as key players in the healthcare sphere. No longer are we working on the edges of care; rather, we are working collaboratively with medicine, nursing, and other allied health professional colleagues in highlighting concerns and in working towards solutions. We are closely connected with our colleagues in the College of Complementary Health Professions of BC, so that we may jointly tackle issues that are of importance to all of us. While we focus on NDs, we have also learned that there is strength in collaboration, and it is with the collective voice that we can demonstrate the strength of our profession. As Simon Sinek once said: “To ask, ‘What’s best for me?’ is finite thinking. To ask, ‘What’s best for us?’ is infinite thinking.” It is the “infinite” thinking approach that BCND strives for and considers in our approach while also being sensitive to any potential impact on ND practice.

BC's NDs are not naïve to the reality that we will not see all the changes we seek to make to the Act, but the collective effort of working with government, working with health professional colleagues, and working with our regulatory body situates NDs

where we need to be, at the forefront of conversation as it relates to healthcare delivery in our province.

We encourage you to keep watch on BC. While we cannot say for sure, we do wonder whether BC's new Act may be the first in a line of changes, some of which could soon be seen across the country.

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