

North Carolina Citizens Need A
-- *Health Freedom Act* --
To Protect Unrestricted Access To
Complementary and Alternative Health Care Services

Problem and Solution

Problem: The concern is that consumer access is limited in NC to complementary and alternative health care because many practitioners do not practice in NC or if they practice they do so under the threat of being criminally charged with practice of medicine without a license. NC law's broad definition of medicine requires anyone practicing the healing arts to have a license or be practicing under an exemption or safe harbor. NC does not provide a safe harbor for the many natural healing arts that are widely practiced and pose no risk of harm to the public.

Solution: This bill is a common sense approach used by other states. It provides an exemption to the practice of medicine violations for those persons practicing a healing art within the prohibited conduct parameters and provides clients with proper disclosures.

Rationale

1. **Liberty** - Every citizen has the right to choose the path of his/her own healing.
2. **Free Market** - Citizens want more healthcare options broaden the availability of all natural healing modalities, consistent with worldwide trends. Total U.S. out-of-pocket expenditures related to alternative health care were conservatively estimated \$27 billion, comparable to the amount spent on out-of-pocket expenditures for all U.S physician services in 1997*.
3. **Cost Effectiveness and Efficacy** - Citizens are facing substantial health insurance cost increases. An estimated 1.4 million (16.75%) North Carolinians do not have health insurance. Citizens want more healthcare options, particularly for chronic illness. Complementary and alternative health care can be used for chronic as well as preventative medicine. Several studies have found that complementary and alternative health care services, as they are currently provided, do not represent a substantial risk to the general public, and may even contribute to improved safety of health care.
4. **States with Exemptions** - Six states (MN, CA, RI, ID, LA, OK) have passed similar health freedom bills. Health freedom bills are being introduced in nine additional states and a total of thirty states are known to be addressing this issue.
5. **Education** - Once protected, the marketplace can more effectively provide citizens with detailed information about complementary and alternative medical services. Freer communication between patients and their conventional and alternative health care providers can benefit all. Two North Carolina medical schools (UNC-CH and Duke) have Integrative Medicine programs actively promoting allied health education in complementary and alternative therapies.

Complementary and Alternative Healthcare Services in North Carolina

Extent of Current Practice - As many as 3.3 million North Carolina citizens receive a substantial volume of health care services from complementary and alternative health care practitioners.

Popularity among Patients - The usage of the broad domain of healing arts including complementary and alternative practices continues to grow even though the patient typically pays for the total cost of the service. Americans made more visits to complementary and alternative healthcare providers (629 mi) than to all primary care physicians (386 mi) in 1997*. Total number of visits to complementary providers increased by 47% from 427 mi in 1990 to 629 mi in 1997 nationwide.*

* Per David Eisenberg, M.D., Harvard Medical School

North Carolina – Citizens for Healthcare Freedom
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