17 Complementary and alternative health

This report does not attempt to look in any comprehensive way at this health workforce group, which is largely not funded via Vote:Health. Rather, it acknowledges the existence of an extensive and growing health workforce accessible to the New Zealand population. A new ministerial advisory committee has been appointed to look at the issues for this workforce group and will define what this group includes.

The term ‘complementary and alternative health’ is intended to cover a wide range of practices. There is some controversy over what is a preferred label. Other descriptors include natural, fringe, (w)holistic, primitive and traditional healing. The different terms tend to refer to a range of different health practices and philosophies. In essence, these practices are drawn together in this section because they are not part of conventional or ‘mainstream’ health practices in New Zealand. The Ministerial Advisory Committee on Complementary and Alternative Health (MACCAH) has provided a list of 76 complementary and alternative therapies practised in New Zealand, including three that have been included in other sections of this report (osteopaths, chiropractors and psychotherapists).

17.1 The complementary and alternative health workforce

The following groups encompass some of the ‘complementary and alternative’ workforces:

- acupuncturists
- herbal therapists
- homoeopaths
- massage therapists
- naturopaths
- traditional healers.

Most complementary and alternative practitioners offer their services privately. There is some funding available through ACC for acupuncture, and chiropractic and osteopathy treatment. There are also some traditional Māori practices, which are funded through Māori health provider organisations. Some GPs complement their medical practice with alternative medicine. A survey in 1990 by Marshall et al (1990) found that 30% of the 249 respondents practised at least one form of ‘alternative medicine’, while two-thirds of respondents referred patients to alternative treatment.
17.1.1 Capacity

The New Zealand Charter of Health Practitioners estimates that there are approximately 10,000 complementary and alternative health practitioners in New Zealand in 2001. The Charter represents approximately 8500 practitioners, which it estimates to constitute approximately 85 percent of the total workforce group (MACCAH 2001). There is no reliable information on the demographics of this workforce group.

17.1.2 Education and training

A wide range of formal training courses are available for different aspects of the complementary and alternative health workforce. Traditional healing is usually learnt in a different manner and is not available in formal institutions. Tertiary institution training varies from a weekend course to a four-year diploma. Most training establishments are registered with the NZQA.

Table 17.1: Complementary and alternative health practitioner training available in New Zealand

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Complementary and alternative health practitioner training</th>
<th>Otago Polytechnic</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Aoraki Polytechnic Certificate in Complementary Therapies</td>
<td>Certificate in Massage Therapy</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Auckland University of Technology Certificate in Holistic Therapies</td>
<td>Wellpark College of Natural Therapies Certificate of Massage</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bay of Plenty College of Homeopathy Advanced Diploma in Homeopathy</td>
<td>Diploma of Massage</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bay of Plenty College of Homeopathy Diploma of Homoeopathy</td>
<td>Certificate of Aromatherapy</td>
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<tr>
<td>Bay of Plenty College of Homeopathy Homeopathy Foundation Course</td>
<td>Certificate of Ayurveda</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bay of Plenty College of Homeopathy Diploma in Aromatherapy</td>
<td>Diploma of Aromatherapy</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Canterbury College of Natural Medicine Advanced Sports Massage</td>
<td>Diploma of Ayurveda</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Canterbury College of Natural Medicine Certificate in Natural Health Studies (Introduction to Natural Health)</td>
<td>Diploma of Naturopathy</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Canterbury College of Natural Medicine Certificate in Neuromuscular Technique</td>
<td>Double Diploma of Massage and Holistic Sports</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Canterbury College of Natural Medicine Corrective Exercise to Prevent Injury</td>
<td>UCOL Universal College of Learning Certificate in Advanced Reflexology – Level 5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Canterbury College of Natural Medicine Diploma in Clinical Herbal Medicine</td>
<td>Naturopathic College of New Zealand Diploma of Naturopathy</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Canterbury College of Natural Medicine Diploma in Massage Therapy</td>
<td>Elementary Herbology (Short Course)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NZ School of Acupuncture and TCM Diploma in Acupuncture and Chinese Herbal Medicine</td>
<td>Homeobotanical Therapy (Short Course)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NZ School of Acupuncture and TCM Diploma in Tuina-Qigong</td>
<td>Homeopathy (Short Course)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Aromaflex International Aromatherapy School Advanced Certificate in Reflexology</td>
<td>Introductory Naturopathy (Short Course)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Aromaflex International Aromatherapy School Diploma in Reflexology</td>
<td>South Pacific College of Natural Therapeutics (NZ) Inc Advanced Diploma in Naturopathy</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Aromaflex International Aromatherapy School Introduction to Reflexology</td>
<td>Whitecliffe College of Art and Design Art Therapy</td>
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</tbody>
</table>
17.1.3 Specific regulation and interest groups

A range of legislation and its regulations – such as the Health and Disability Commissioners Act 1994, the Fair Trading Act 1996 and the Medicines Act 1981 – impact on complementary and alternative health practitioners. There is also a Traditional Māori Healing Standards document. The proposed Health Practitioner’s Competence Assurance Bill may regulate some complementary and alternative health practitioners, such as acupuncturists.

A New Zealand Charter of Health Practitioners was formed in 1993 to represent the variety of complementary and alternative modalities in New Zealand. There are currently 68 professional bodies affiliated to the Charter. The Charter estimates that this represents approximately 75 percent of all the professional bodies representing complementary and alternative modalities in New Zealand.

17.1.4 Key issues

The key issues for this workforce are reflected in the terms of reference for the new Ministerial Advisory Committee on Complementary and Alternative Health. The key tasks of this committee are:

i) to provide information and advice to the Minister on complementary and alternative healthcare

ii) to provide advice on how complementary and alternative healthcare can improve outcomes in the priority areas signalled in the New Zealand Health Strategy

iii) to provide advice on the need, or otherwise, to regulate complementary and alternative healthcare practitioners in order to protect consumers who use complementary and alternative healthcare

iv) to provide advice on consumer information needs and, in particular, advice on the benefits, risks and costs of complementary and alternative therapies

v) to review overseas evidence-based research, identify priorities for the development of New Zealand evidence-based research on the safety and efficacy of specific complementary and alternative therapies and support the development of guidelines

vi) to provide advice on whether, and how, specified complementary and alternative health practitioners should be integrated into the mainstream system.

17.2 Acupuncture

Acupuncture is practised as a principal health occupation, usually in a traditional Chinese medicine practice or as an adjunct to other health care practices.

17.2.1 Capacity

There are no overall data about the numbers of acupuncturists in New Zealand, but an estimate of the size of this workforce can be deduced from the numbers belonging to various acupuncture organisations.
There are essentially two types of practitioners delivering acupuncture services.

- Practitioners who are primarily trained, qualified and practising in acupuncture, including the 180 members of the New Zealand Register of Acupuncturists Inc (NZRA). Of these, 48 percent are of Asian descent. There are four other acupuncture organisations with about another 80 members.
- There are also those who are primarily trained and qualified in another discipline, who choose to offer services in acupuncture as an adjunct to their practice. This includes GPs, osteopaths, chiropractors, nurses, physiotherapists, naturopaths and traditional Chinese medicine practitioners.

The Medical Acupuncture Society reports 107 members and 28 registered medical acupuncturists (medical practitioners who have undertaken the full formal training prescribed by the Society.) There are currently 38 members of the New Zealand Institute of Acupuncture. These include people also trained as medical practitioners, osteopaths, chiropractors, nurses, physiotherapists and traditional Chinese medicine practitioners.

17.2.2 Education, training, regulation and interest groups

There is a National Diploma of Acupuncture approved in the NZQA framework. The first students graduated from this course in October 2000; another 28 were expected in 2001.

Historically, the acupuncture industry in New Zealand has been fractured. The new Acupuncture Council of New Zealand is seeking to unify the various groups, and held its first annual general meeting in October 2001. Other organisations with interests in acupuncture include:

- New Zealand Register of Acupuncturists (NZRA)
- New Zealand Institute of Acupuncture
- New Zealand School of Acupuncture and Traditional Chinese Medicine
- Physiotherapists Association Acupuncture Society of New Zealand.

17.2.3 Key issues

Education of the public

There needs to be better public awareness of the therapeutic uses of acupuncture.

Standards of practice

There is some controversy among acupuncturists about what are acceptable standards and how they should be set. No organisation is currently responsible for oversight of acupuncture training or ongoing quality assurance of practitioners. There are negotiations to bring acupuncture under the new Health Practitioners’ Competence Assurance legislation.

The Medical Acupuncture Society aims to get vocational registration as a medical specialty under the auspices of the Royal New Zealand College of General Practitioners.

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Source: Submissions to HWAC from the New Zealand Institute of Acupuncture, the Medical Acupuncture Society (NZ) and the NZ Register of Acupuncturists Inc.
**Funding equity**

At present there is only funding for medical practitioners and physiotherapists performing acupuncture. The New Zealand Register of Acupuncturists (NZRA) submits that other well-qualified practitioners, such as nurses, midwives, manual therapists and traditional Chinese medicine practitioners, should also be eligible. In addition, ACC recognises NZRA as a provider, with the exclusion of the traditional Chinese organisations. This situation is reported by some to exacerbate confusion in the role of the NZRA, between the objectives of a competency-based measurement of skill and maintaining a commercial advantage.

17.3 **Sources of information used for the ‘complementary and alternative health’ section**
