

SENATE THIRD READING
SB 1303 (Wahab)
As Amended August 26, 2026
Majority vote

SUMMARY

Extends the sunset date for the California Board of Naturopathic Medicine (Board) until January 1, 2031 and makes additional technical changes, statutory improvements, and policy reforms in response to issues raised during the Board's sunset review oversight process.

Major Provisions

- 1) Extends the Board's sunset date until January 1, 2031.
- 2) Staggers the terms of members appointed by the Governor after the bill's effective date as follows:
 - a) Two members shall serve an initial term of two years.
 - b) Two members shall serve an initial term of three years.
 - c) Three members shall serve an initial term of four years.
 - d) Thereafter, all appointments shall be for four-year terms.
- 3) Repeals obsolete language exempting applicants who graduated prior to 1986 from specified application requirements for applications received prior to December 31, 2007.
- 4) Authorizes the Board to accept the voluntary cancellation of a naturopathic doctor (ND) license upon the written request of the licensee, provided that the cancellation is not in lieu of an administrative enforcement action.
- 5) Establishes a process for an ND to obtain a fictitious-name permit, which would allow for ND to practice under a name other than their own.
- 6) Provides that the use of any fictitious, false, or assumed name, or any name other than their own by a licensee either alone, in conjunction with a partnership or group, or as the name of a professional corporation, in any public communication, advertisement, sign, or announcement of their practice without a fictitious-name permit constitutes unprofessional conduct.
- 7) Revises the requirements for a naturopathic medical education program to obtain approval from the Board.
- 8) Establishes new penalties for the unlicensed practice or advertising of naturopathic medicine, or the aiding or abetting thereof.
- 9) Provides that an unlicensed person may provide authorized services not within the reserved scope of practice of an ND and may use the title "naturopath" in conjunction with those services under the existing framework for alternative and complementary care.

COMMENTS

Sunset review. In order to ensure that California's myriad professional oversight entities are meeting the state's public protection priorities, authorizing statutes for these regulatory bodies are subject to statutory dates of repeal, at which point the entity "sunset" unless the date is extended by the Legislature. The sunset process provides for a regular forum for discussion around the successes and challenges of various programs and the consideration of proposed changes to laws governing the regulation of professionals. Currently, the sunset review process applies to approximately three dozen different boards, bureaus, and commissions housed within the DCA, as well as the Department of Real Estate and three nongovernmental nonprofit councils.

On a schedule averaging every four years, each entity is required to present a report to the Legislature's policy committees, which in return prepare a comprehensive background paper on the efficacy and efficiency of their licensing and enforcement programs. Both the Administration and regulated professional stakeholders actively engage in this process. Legislation is then subsequently introduced extending the repeal date for the entity along with any reforms identified during the sunset review process.

California Board of Naturopathic Medicine. The Board is responsible for licensing and regulating NDs under the Naturopathic Doctors Act. The foundational principle of naturopathy is a belief that the human body is capable of healing itself with the assistance of natural therapies and treatments. Naturopathic medicine is a system of primary health care that integrates the values and practices of traditional naturopathy with modern methods and modalities for the diagnosing, treating, and preventing of health conditions, injuries, and disease. As of June 30, 2025, there were 1,057 active ND licensees in California. NDs provide care in a variety of settings, including solo practices, integrative clinics, and academic institutions.

Issues Raised during Sunset Review. The background paper for Board's sunset review oversight hearing contained a total of 16 issues and recommendations, each of which is eligible to result in statutory changes enacted through Board's sunset bill.

Board Expiration Dates. Issue #2 in the sunset background paper for the Board noted that four of the seven members' terms expired on January 1, 2026, and those members are serving their grace year. The sunset background paper considered whether Board member terms need to be staggered. Board members serve four-year terms, and members may not serve more than two consecutive terms. Members may continue to serve after their term's expiration date until a replacement is appointed or one year has elapsed, whichever occurs sooner. Appointments for prematurely vacated positions are initially for the remainder of the term only.

At the time that the sunset background paper was published, the Board had two vacancies and six of its seven appointed members serving in their second term or ineligible for a second term and serving in their grace year, including the Board President. Without staggering member terms, the Board could have effectively been left with one remaining Board member. Without amending member terms, nearly the entire Board roster could need to be replaced at one time, which would place undue pressure on the appointments process and introduce instability to program operations that would be avoidable under a coordinated term expiration calendar. This bill would stagger the terms of future members of the Board to ensure greater stability and continuity in the future.

Fictitious Name Permit Program. Issue #6 in the sunset background paper for the Board posed the question of whether the Board should be authorized to issue fictitious name permits to ensure naturopathic practices are complying with Naturopathic Doctors Act naming requirements for corporations. The Board has requested authority to establish a fictitious name permit program during two prior sunset reviews and submitted this request in its current sunset report. During the 2021 sunset review, legislative staff recommended that the Board expand upon its request, providing a clear rationale for how the program would better serve the public.

A fictitious name, also known as a "DBA" (doing business as), is a business name that differs from the legal name of the individual or entity that owns the business and who is licensed by the Board. Currently, consumers may only know a practice by its business or fictitious name. When a consumer files a complaint, this lack of transparency adds a level of complexity to investigations that are meant to be filed against the responsible doctor in the corporation.

For example, if Dr. Jane Smith operates a clinic under the name "Wellness First Medical Group," a consumer will likely file a complaint against the Wellness First Medical Group, not Dr. Smith. According to the Board, a fictitious name permit program would improve the Board's ability to protect the public by enhancing ownership transparency. Establishing a fictitious name permit program would allow both the consumer and the Board to identify the naturopathic doctor who is responsible for the corporation.

Additionally, statute prescribes naming conventions of naturopathic corporations, requiring they contain the words, "naturopathic" or "naturopathic doctor" and words to communicate its status as a corporation. Absent a fictitious name permit program, the Board is unable to proactively ensure compliance with that law during the licensure process and instead, must enforce naming conventions on a reactive basis while investigating a complaint. The process of investigating and educating or citing and issuing an order of abatement for the licensee to correct the deficiency is less effective and more costly for the Board and licensees alike.

Based on the above, the Board strongly believes there is a demonstrated need for a fictitious name permit program. The Board additionally cites the benefit to consumers from preventing misleading or deceptive names, such as those: referring to an individual practice as a "center" or "institute"; referencing a type or scope of practice, including implying a board certification when none exists; using names that are nearly identical to well reputed practices, which is intended to fraudulently siphon off clients; among other forms of deceptive practices that can lead to consumer harm. This bill would establish a framework for the Board to implement a fictitious name permit program.

Naturopath Title Protection. Issue #8 in the sunset background paper for the Board noted that the Board reports that complaints about unlicensed activity accounts for 71 percent of its complaints received. Complainants frequently report confusion when individuals use these titles without licensure, leading consumers to mistakenly believe they are receiving care from a licensed naturopathic doctor. Unlicensed naturopaths contend that they do not fall within the jurisdiction of the Board and therefore, the Board should not be expending resources to investigate these complaints. The sunset background paper considered whether the Board have regulatory authority over unlicensed naturopaths.

As discussed in the sunset background paper, naturopathy is a broadly used term encompassing approximately 50 types of complementary and alternative health care practitioners. Practitioners who might use the title "naturopath" may include those practicing homeopathy, hydrotherapy,

reflexology, iridology, nutritional therapy, acupressure, and others. These practitioners may lawfully provide services that do not require medical training or credentials, so long as they comply with the requirements of the Medical Practice Act.

The Medical Practice Act broadly prohibits the unlicensed practice of medicine, which is punishable as a misdemeanor. However, in 2002, the Legislature enacted SB 577 (Burton), which was intended "to allow access by California residents to complementary and alternative health care practitioners who are not providing services that require medical training and credentials." The legislation cited a report by the National Institute of Medicine and other studies that found that "millions of Californians, perhaps more than five million, are presently receiving a substantial volume of health care services from complementary and alternative health care practitioners" but that "the provision of many of these services may be in technical violation of the Medical Practice Act."

SB 577 established an exception to the Medical Practice Act's prohibitions on the unlicensed practice of medicine for practitioners who provide alternative or complementary care. Those practitioners may not imply that they are licensed physicians, and must disclose in any advertisements that they are not licensed by the state. Additionally, alternative and complementary care practitioners must provide patients with various specified disclosures prior to providing services, which must be acknowledged in writing by the patient.

In addition to being protected from violating the Medical Practice Act if the above requirements are met, complementary and alternative health care practitioners are permitted to use the titles of "Naturopath," "Naturopathic practitioner," or "Traditional naturopathic practitioner" if the person using the title is educated and trained as the title suggests. However, the requisite education and training are not prescribed, and Board licensure is not required. Additionally, the Medical Practice Act does not require specified education or training. Placement of title protection for an unlicensed population within the Naturopathic Doctors Act seems to be cause for consumers who file complaints against unlicensed naturopaths with the Board. Equally a cause of confusion for consumers is the similarly phrased protected titles – "naturopathic doctor" and "naturopath" – that may lead consumers to file complaints with the Board.

The sunset background paper recommended that the Board advise the Committees of necessary changes to increase its efficacy in protecting the public from the complaints about unlicensed naturopaths and unlicensed activity in general while simultaneously reducing its enforcement expenditures. The Board was also urged to advise the Committees if consumers would be better served if the terms "naturopath," "naturopathic practitioner," and "traditional naturopathic practitioner" were replaced with terms more specific to the actual service being provided or another less confusing term. The Board was directed to update the Committees on whether requiring registration would benefit consumers, naturopaths, and the Board.

This bill would revise the Board's authority to take action against individuals engaged in, or aiding or abetting, the unlicensed practice or advertising of naturopathic medicine. The bill would codify specific penalties that may be imposed for violations of the Naturopathic Doctors Act. The bill would then specifically exempt the provision of services authorized by SB 577 and the use of the title "naturopath" when the unlicensed individual is complying with the disclosure and consent requirements for alternative and complementary care providers. This language is intended to ensure that consumers who receive unlicensed "naturopathy" services are aware they are not receiving services from an ND and the Board does not have oversight over those services.

Technical Changes. Issue #15 in the sunset background paper for the Board suggested that there may be instances where nonsubstantive and technical changes to the Naturopathic Doctors Act are needed to correct deficiencies or other inconsistencies in the law. Because of numerous statutory changes, code sections can become confusing, contain provisions that are no longer applicable, make references to outdated report requirements, and cross-reference code sections that are no longer relevant. The Board's sunset review is an appropriate time to review, recommend, and make necessary statutory changes. This bill includes changes of this nature.

Continued Regulation. Issue #16 in the sunset background paper for the Board considered whether the licensing and regulation of NDs should be continued and regulated by the Board. The sunset background paper concluded that the welfare of consumers is best preserved under the presence of a strong licensing and regulatory program to oversee NDs that can sustain its existence through license fees. The sunset background paper recommended that the Board should be continued and reviewed again on a future date to be determined. This bill would extend the Board's sunset date by an additional four years.

According to the Author

"The bill extends the sunset date for the Board and enacts technical changes, statutory improvements, and policy reforms in response to issues raised during the Board's sunset review oversight process."

Arguments in Support

The *California Naturopathic Doctors Association* (CNDA) supports this bill, writing: "Licensure and regulation of naturopathic doctors ensure that only individuals who meet all the education and competency standards set forth in law (SB 907) are eligible for licensure. The CBNM also verifies that those granted a license continue to meet the ongoing continuing medical education requirements outlined in statute, as well as practice naturopathic medicine in accordance with the scope requirements of SB 907, thereby assuring public safety. Licensure and regulation of the California naturopathic doctor profession by the California Board of Naturopathic Medicine provides California citizens with safe access to a licensed and regulated workforce that helps expand access to primary and preventive care, and an appropriate regulatory structure for the profession."

Arguments in Opposition

While there is no opposition to the current version of this bill, the *American Naturopathic Association* (ANA) previously submitted a letter opposing the Board's proposed amendment to expand title protection for NDs, which is similar to language now contained in this bill. The ANA letter states: "The proposed amendment contradicts the Legislature's original intent and would retroactively alter the balance struck in 2003. Existing consumer protection, disclosure, and advertising laws already address misrepresentation. Further title restriction would not enhance public safety, but would instead eliminate lawful drugless professions, reduce consumer choice, and expand regulatory authority beyond what was originally contemplated."

FISCAL COMMENTS

According to the Assembly Committee on Appropriations, costs of approximately \$761,000 per year to continue operation of the Board; the Board anticipates minor and absorbable costs for an increase in workload to create and implement retired status, as well as increases in revenue; the Department of Consumer Affairs (DCA) anticipates absorbable costs for system updates to support the new fictitious name permit program.

VOTES**SENATE FLOOR: 39-0-1**

YES: Allen, Alvarado-Gil, Archuleta, Arreguín, Ashby, Becker, Blakespear, Cabaldon, Caballero, Cervantes, Choi, Cortese, Durazo, Gonzalez, Grayson, Grove, Hurtado, Jones, Laird, Limón, McGuire, McNerney, Menjivar, Niello, Ochoa Bogh, Padilla, Pérez, Reyes, Richardson, Rubio, Seyarto, Smallwood-Cuevas, Stern, Strickland, Umberg, Valladares, Wahab, Weber Pierson, Wiener

ABS, ABST OR NV: Dahle

ASM BUSINESS AND PROFESSIONS: 17-0-2

YES: Berman, Johnson, Addis, Ahrens, Alanis, Bauer-Kahan, Chen, Elhawary, Hadwick, Haney, Hart, Irwin, Jackson, Lowenthal, Macedo, Nguyen, Pellerin

ABS, ABST OR NV: Bains, Caloza

ASM APPROPRIATIONS: 14-0-1

YES: Wicks, Hoover, Arambula, Calderon, Caloza, Dixon, Fong, Mark González, Krell, Pacheco, Pellerin, Sharp-Collins, Solache, Tangipa

ABS, ABST OR NV: Ta

ASM BUSINESS AND PROFESSIONS: 17-0-2

YES: Berman, Johnson, Addis, Ahrens, Alanis, Bauer-Kahan, Caloza, Chen, Elhawary, Haney, Hart, Irwin, Jackson, Lowenthal, Macedo, Nguyen, Pellerin

ABS, ABST OR NV: Bains, Hadwick

UPDATED

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