

## Measure would target rogue naturopaths



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**Update:** *This story has been updated to reflect that while the number of complaints in the naturopathic care industry has increased, the percentage of licensees receiving complaints has decreased.*

The state Senate committee on Health Care and Human Services plans to hold a public hearing next week to consider tightening state laws governing the naturopathic medicine industry.

**Senate Bill 108** targets rogue naturopaths who are caught earning money through fraud or deception, practicing under an assumed name, claiming to offer cures for incurable diseases or injuries, performing an abortion or prescribing medicines they are not allowed to dispense.

The measure would strip [Naturopathic Licensing Board](#) credentials from violators and impose civil penalties of up to \$5,000 for each offense.

Oregon has the highest number of licensed naturopathic physicians in the nation, with about 450 in the Portland area. They can prescribe most pharmaceuticals, including controlled substances (though not medical marijuana), deliver babies and perform minor surgeries. Some insurance plans cover their services as primary care and others do not.

The industry has grown rapidly in the Portland area partly because of the success of the [National College of Natural Medicine](#), the oldest school of its kind in the country.

**Laura Farr**, the executive director of the [Oregon Association of Naturopathic Physicians](#), said, "As integrative medicine becomes more and more popular, we see more people claiming they practice naturopathic medicine when they don't. We want to hold the profession to high standards and make sure people aren't making claims that aren't true."

The committee has scheduled a public hearing on the issue for 3 p.m. next Tuesday, Feb. 5 in Salem.

Anne Walsh, executive director of the Oregon Board of Naturopathic Medicine, said the number of investigated complaints about naturopaths has increased as the industry has grown. "In 1998 we had about 200 licensees," she said. "Today we have over 1,000."

Walsh said the average number of investigated complaints has grown from about 10 per year to more than 30 per year more recently. But while the total complaints have increased, the percentage one licensees receiving complaints has dropped, from five percent of licensees to four percent.

The most common complaints involve personal boundary issues between the caregiver and the patient, as well as the writing of prescriptions for chronic pain management.