

Chiropractic Medicine in New Mexico: Part of the Solution to the Primary Care Physician Shortage

Education of Chiropractic Physicians

Chiropractic physicians in New Mexico undergo rigorous education and training. The typical path includes nearly four years of pre-medical undergraduate education, followed by 5 year calendar equivalent years of professional study at an accredited chiropractic college. This includes extensive clinical training to master intricate clinical presentations of our patients. Chiropractic Physicians have five national board examinations they must pass, all related to primary care diseases, conditions and clinical management. The trend of graduates from Chiropractic Colleges is to join healthcare systems like the VA and Community Centers to treat within a primary care team model. Nationally there are five recognized physician level provider groups in the Social Security Act; Allopathic Medicine, Chiropractic Medicine, Osteopathic Medicine, Dentistry and Podiatry.

Educational Comparison of Healthcare professionals

These figures represent approximate classroom and clinical hours based on accreditation guidelines and program structures in the U.S. Keep in mind that exact hours may vary by institution and region.

1. Medical Doctors (MDs or DOs)

- Classroom hours: Approximately 3,000 to 4,000 hours. This includes foundational sciences like anatomy, physiology, biochemistry, and pharmacology in the first two years of medical school.
- Clinical hours: Around 2,500 to 3,000 hours in the final two years, spent in clinical rotations across various specialties (e.g., internal medicine, surgery, pediatrics).
- Total hours: 6,000 to 7,000 hours.

References:

- Association of American Medical Colleges (AAMC): Medical education timeline and curriculum requirements can be found in AAMC's guidance on medical school education ([AAMC Medical Education (<https://www.aamc.org/services/student-resources/medical-school-education>)]).
- Liaison Committee on Medical Education (LCME): The accreditation standards for U.S. MD programs, including curriculum structure, are detailed in the LCME's resources ([LCME Standards] (<https://lcme.org/>)).

2. Nurse Practitioners (NPs)

- Classroom hours: Approximately 500 to 700 hours in advanced sciences, including pharmacology, health assessment, and diagnostic reasoning.
- Clinical hours: Typically, 500 to 1,000 supervised clinical hours, often based on the specialty.
- Total hours: 1,000 to 1,700 hours.

References:

- American Association of Nurse Practitioners (AANP): Curriculum requirements and program lengths for NP education are described on the AANP website ([AANP Education Requirements] (<https://www.aanp.org/education/graduate-nurse-practitioner-programs>)).
- American Nurses Credentialing Center (ANCC): Certification and educational requirements for NPs are laid out by the ANCC ([ANCC Certification] (<https://www.nursingworld.org/ancc/>)).

3. Physician Assistants (PAs)

- Classroom hours: Approximately 2,000 to 2,500 hours of didactic education covering medical sciences, anatomy, clinical medicine, and pathology.
- Clinical hours: Around 2,000 hours in clinical rotations, including general medicine and specialized fields.
- Total hours: 4,000 to 4,500 hours.

References:

- Accreditation Review Commission on Education for the Physician Assistant (ARC-PA): Guidelines and standards for PA education programs are outlined by ARC-PA ([ARC-PA Accreditation] (<http://www.arc-pa.org/accreditation/>)).
- Physician Assistant Education Association (PAEA): PAEA provides program-level data and educational requirements for PA programs ([PAEA Overview] (<https://paeonline.org/>))

4. Chiropractic Physicians (DCs)

- Classroom hours: Around 4,200 to 4,500 hours. This includes coursework in anatomy, physiology, biomechanics, chiropractic techniques, neurology, and radiology.
- Clinical hours: Approximately 1,000 hours of supervised clinical training, including patient care and diagnostics.
- Total hours: 5,200 to 5,500 hours.

References:

- Council on Chiropractic Education (CCE): Accreditation standards for chiropractic education programs are available on the CCE website ([CCE Accreditation] (<http://www.cce-usa.org/>)).

Scope of Practice

New Mexico has one of the most comprehensive scopes of practice for chiropractic physicians in the United States. Chiropractic physicians are licensed to provide services designed to restore and maintain whole body health through conservative first methods taught in chiropractic colleges and accredited postgraduate courses. There are no restrictions in diagnosing, testing or referring for any primary care healthcare condition.

Advanced Practice Certified (APC) Program

The Advanced Practice Certified (APC) program, established nearly 20 years ago, allows chiropractic physicians an educational pathway to have a limited prescriptive authority for therapeutic and diagnostic purposes. This program has been instrumental in expanding the role of chiropractic physicians further into primary care.

Proposed Expansion of Scope of Practice

To address the primary care crisis in New Mexico, we propose expanding the scope of practice to include additional clerkships or residencies within the healthcare system. This would facilitate chiropractic physicians, as physician level providers, to further integrate into the healthcare system and provide more comprehensive primary care. New Mexico desperately needs physician level providers to join in primary care teams in every county of the State.

Primary Care Shortage in New Mexico

New Mexico faces a shortage of primary care physicians that can only be described as a crisis. Medical schools are only graduating 2-4% of their students into the field of primary care. Presently, as reported by the *Santa Fe New Mexican*, there are 4 midlevel providers delivering primary care for every one physician level provider. The Cerio Institute reported New Mexico ranks in the bottom half of the country for primary care availability, and nearly 40% of the physician population in New Mexico is nearing retirement age. During the COVID19 pandemic, the situation became so dire, Doctors Without Borders and FEMA had to step in to provide emergency medical support. This real time crisis revealed just how much of a shortage we have here in New Mexico for primary care and the situation has only gotten worse for physician level primary care. The Chiropractic profession warned of this potential crisis when we last introduced this Bill in 2017. Those opposing the Bill assured the legislature that there were enough primary care physicians to handle any healthcare crisis in New Mexico. We have, unfortunately, learned the hard way that this just is not true. It is time for New Mexico to be more forward thinking and not concede to traditional pathways that no longer serve our citizens.

Other Healthcare Professions with Expanded Scope of Practice

1. Naturopathic Doctors (NDs)

- Scope of Practice: NDs in New Mexico can provide primary care, prescribe certain medications, and use natural therapies to treat patients.
- Educational Requirements: NDs must graduate from a 4-year, accredited naturopathic medical program and pass the Naturopathic Physicians Licensing Examination (NPLEX).

2. Other Healthcare Professions

- Scope of Practice: Other professions such as psychologists, pharmacists and optometrists have also seen expansions in their scope of practice in New Mexico to include prescribing medications for specific conditions.
- Educational Requirements: These professions require specific degrees and certifications relevant to their fields, such as Doctor of Pharmacy (PharmD) for pharmacists and Doctor of Optometry (OD) for optometrists.

Chiropractic Physicians as part of the solution

The chiropractic profession is uniquely poised to be part of a comprehensive solution to the primary care provider shortage in New Mexico. We propose an educational pathway to allow chiropractic physicians to gain more experience and education in primary care, allowing them to practice with a scope of practice on par with other provider types.

References

1. [New Mexico Chiropractic Physicians: A Pattern of Advanced Practice with Primary Care Privileges](#)
2. [Advanced Practice - NM Chiropractic Association](#)
3. [New Mexico Chiropractic Board](#)
4. [New Mexico Physician Shortage Facts](#)
5. [Doctors Without Borders Response to COVID-19 in the United States](#)
6. [FEMA's Role in COVID-19 Response](#)

