



## A Guide to Starting a Natural Therapy Practice

### **Introduction:**

A Guide to Starting a Natural Therapy Practice has been developed by the Australian Natural Therapists Association (ANTA) to assist students and new practitioners in getting the best start to their career and establishing a successful practice.

Starting a new practice can be challenging and this guide outlines some of the areas to be considered.

### **Research:**

Before enrolling in a course of study in natural therapies, undertake some research about the disciplines/modalities that you are interested in studying. Do you want to specialise in a particular discipline/modality e.g. Remedial Massage Therapy or do you want to undertake study that covers multiple disciplines/modalities such as Naturopathy (includes Herbal Medicine, Remedial Therapy, Nutrition, Homoeopathy).

ANTA is a multi discipline/modality association that accredits and represents the interests of practitioners in the following disciplines/modalities:

- Acupuncture
- Aromatherapy
- Ayurvedic Medicine
- Chinese Herbal Medicine
- Chiropractic
- Counselling
- Herbal Medicine (Western)
- Homoeopathy
- Myotherapy
- Musculoskeletal Therapy
- Naturopathy
- Nutrition
- Oriental Remedial Therapies
- Remedial Massage Therapy
- Traditional Chinese Medicine

Obtain as much information about the demand, market, location, competition for the discipline/modality that you are considering.

Consider your suitability for the discipline/modality.

### **Free Student Membership:**

All students enrolled in a course recognised by ANTA are eligible to apply for FREE Student Membership with ANTA. Students can join ANTA online.

### **Qualifications:**

An important step in establishing yourself in the natural therapy profession is to obtain appropriate training/qualifications in the discipline/modality that you have chosen.

The list of courses and level of qualification recognised by ANTA together with membership information is outlined on the ANTA website.

It should be noted that ANTA does not recognise undergraduate courses completed by distance education. Health Funds and Work Cover Authorities also do not recognise distance education for provider purposes.

### **Selecting Location:**

The location of your practice is very important as it can have an impact on the success of your practice. Consider the State, City, Suburb or Region in which you would like to set up your practice. Gain an understanding of the demographics and economic characteristics of the area you are considering setting up your practice. Is there a demand for your discipline/modality in the area, what competition is in the area, are there other practices or health services in the area that might compliment your practice, is there scope for growth in the area.

Contact the local council for information about the area (demographics, growth, economic factors, other natural therapy practises, other health practises and services etc).

### **Success Factors:**

There are many factors within your control that can determine your success:

- **Deliver high quality professional health services**  
A large percentage of the public now use a natural therapist as their primary health care practitioner and will continue to consult with their natural therapist provided they obtain quality professional health services.
- **Build a reputation based on good service and results**  
A reputation based on good service and results is a valuable marketing tool. Many of the new referrals you receive will come as result of your patients passing on information about your service and results to their family, friends, work colleagues etc.
- **Make your practise visible and accessible to the local market**  
The public need to be able to find your practice. Make your practice visible by to the local market by considering using signage, advertisements, flyers, brochures etc.
- **Join a Reputable Bona Fide professional association**  
There are many benefits in joining a reputable and bona fide association that maintains high standards. The quality, standards, services and benefits provided by associations can vary considerably and it is wise to ensure you join a bona fide association.
- **Maintain up-to-date complete and accurate client records**  
Maintaining accurate complete and up-to-date client records is vital in the delivery of quality health services to your patients.
- **Maintain up-to-date financial records**  
Maintaining up-to-date financial records is a legal requirement and is also vital in monitoring the performance and success of your practice.
- **Manage your cash flow (a positive cash flow is vital)**

Cash Flow is the life blood of your business. Without sufficient cash flow to run your business your chances of success are diminished. It is important to monitor your income and outgoings and ensure you have sufficient funds to keep your business going.

- **Consider start up costs and set a Budget for starting up your practice**  
Starting up a practice requires expenditure. Develop a realistic itemised budget for all the costs and expenditure involved in setting up your practice. Under budgeting in this area can lead to problems and have an impact on your cash flow.
- **Identify your goals and objectives**  
Set yourself goals and objectives that you want to achieve in the short term (i.e. 1 year) and the long term (2-5 years). Review your goals and objectives regularly to monitor progress and to make any changes.
- **Develop a Marketing Plan**  
A Marketing Plan on how you intend to market your practice to the local community is important. Consider all the marketing avenues available (i.e. local news papers, local radio, internet, brochures, flyers, signage etc).  
Understand your market and how to target your market (what works, what doesn't).  
Talk to other businesses in the area and ask patients for their opinions.  
Identify and make contact with other health services or businesses in the area that might compliment your practice.  
Develop a marketing plan that includes strategies, market segment/profile, advertising program, costs, target audience and results.
- **Know your Competitors**  
Identify any competitors in the area in which you are considering setting up your practice.  
How do they market their services, are they successful, what are their strengths and weaknesses.  
What health services do they provide and what rates do they charge.
- **Develop a Financial Plan/Budget**  
It is important to develop a Financial Plan or Budget to identify and monitor your income, costs and expenditure during the year.  
Establish a realistic budget for the income you expect to earn during the year and identify all the costs and expenditures associated in running your practice.  
(income – expenditure = profit/loss).  
On a regular basis monitor your actual income and expenditure and compare how you are performing against your budgeted income and expenditure. This will identify any areas where you are under or over budget and assist in making and any changes to your business practises.
- **Continuing Professional Education (CPE)**  
ANTA requires members to undertake 20 hours of CPE each year and CPE is now a condition of health fund recognition. CPE is important in keeping abreast of developments, new techniques and treatment available with the profession and your area of training/expertise.

**Licences & Regulations:**

When establishing a new practice it is important to identify what licenses are required and regulations you must comply with.

Licenses relating to premises and your practice can vary considerably depending on whether you intend building, renovating, taking over an existing business, leasing, working from home etc. In the first instance you should contact your local council to obtain details of licenses required and regulations in that jurisdiction.

### **Business Structure:**

There are several ways in which a natural therapy practice can be structured:

- Company
- Sole Trader
- Partnership
- Trust

This is a complex area and it is recommended that you seek advice from an accountant and or solicitor on the type of business structures available and suitable for your requirements.

### **Business Insurance:**

There are many business insurance products available depending on how you set up your business and you should consult with your insurer on products available for your practice.

### **Professional Indemnity Insurance:**

To protect the public and the practitioner there are insurance products specifically designed for practising natural therapists. It is a requirement of ANTA membership, health fund provider recognition and work cover provider recognition that all natural therapists have current professional indemnity insurance. Insurance Policies as a minimum should cover your legal responsibility to pay:

- Damages, legal expenses and liability arising from breaches of your professional duties including advice, treatment, prescribing and dispensing.
- Personal injury to third parties
- Liabilities from goods manufactured sold or supplied.
- Liabilities arising from actions of any employees
- Liable and slander
- Damage to property
- Public liability

ANTA has further information available for members regarding insurance available for ANTA members.

### **First Aid Qualifications:**

In the event of an emergency, natural therapists should be able to administer first aid to patients.

It is a requirement of ANTA membership, health fund provider recognition and work cover recognition that all practising natural therapists have current senior first aid qualifications.

### **Health Fund & Work Cover Provider Recognition:**

On the 1<sup>st</sup> July 2009 section 10 of the Private Health Insurance (Accreditation) Rules 2008 come into force.

Section 10 of the rules which apply to all natural therapists' state:

*If the treatment is provided by a health care provider who is not referred to in subrule 7(1) or rule 8 or 9, the standard for that treatment is that the health care provider providing the treatment must be a member of a professional organisation which covers health care providers who provide that type of treatment (the profession) and which:*

- (a) is a national entity which has membership requirements for the profession; and
- (b) provides assessment of the health care provider in terms of the appropriate level of training and education required to practise in that profession; and
- (c) administers a continuing professional development scheme in which the health care provider is required as a condition of membership, to participate; and
- (d) maintains a code of conduct which the health care provider must uphold in order to continue to be a member; and
- (e) maintains a formal disciplinary procedure, which includes a process to suspend or expel members, and an appropriate complaints resolution procedure.

ANTA members have extensive health provider recognition across the disciplines/modalities accredited by ANTA.

ANTA meets the requirements outlined in the rules which are effective on the 1st July 2009 for provider recognition with health funds.

#### **Clinic Standards, Hygiene and Infection Control:**

Under Federal, State and Local Council regulations, certain clinic standards must be maintained.

ANTA has further information available for members on Clinic Standards, Hygiene and Infection Control.

#### **Privacy Act:**

The Privacy Amendment (Private Sector) Act 2000 covers the private health sector in Australia and applies to all natural therapists. There are certain obligations required under the act and natural therapists should fully acquaint themselves with the privacy rules which are available at [www.privacy.gov.au](http://www.privacy.gov.au)

ANTA has further information available for members on Privacy .

#### **GST:**

Under Section 38-10 of the GST Act some natural therapy services are GST free under certain circumstances. ANTA has further information for members on the GST and also recommends you consult with an accountant. Registering for the GST can be optional under certain circumstances and you should contact the Australian Taxation Office or consult with your accountant.

ANTA has received a private ruling from the Australian Taxation Office that states:

*'ANTA is a professional association that has uniform national registration requirements for practitioners of natural therapies and traditional medicine. Consequently practitioners, who are members of ANTA will be considered to be recognised professionals for the purpose of paragraph 38-10(1)(b) of the GST Act.'*

#### **Business Name:**

To apply for a business name and ABN you should contact the Australian Securities and Investments Commission [www.asic.gov.au](http://www.asic.gov.au) . To register a business name in your state, contact the Office of Fair Trading in your state.

#### **Business Finance:**

To obtain finance for your business contact your financial advisor, bank or lending institution.

#### **Business Bank Account:**

To set up a business bank account you should contact your bank to obtain their advice.

#### **Further Assistance:**

ANTA has a fully staffed National Administration Office open Mon – Fri that provides services and support for ANTA members. Contact ANTA on [info@anta.com.au](mailto:info@anta.com.au) [www.anta.com.au](http://www.anta.com.au) or free call 1800 817 577 for further information and assistance.

Commonwealth and State Government Agencies also provide services and assistance in setting up a new business and you should check with the relevant government agency in your state.

The Australian Taxation Office website [www.ato.gov.au](http://www.ato.gov.au) also provides information on tax requirements in running a business.