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No double standards for natural health products

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Natural health products and medicinal foods should be subject to the same regulations as pharmaceutical drugs to ensure safety and efficacy, states an editorial in *CMAJ* (*Canadian Medical Association Journal*).

While [pharmaceutical drugs](#) are subject to rigorous evaluation and must provide significant evidence of their therapeutic effects and that the benefits outweigh risks, natural health products in Canada are not. Many contain active pharmacological substances that can have potent effects and interactions which should have warnings.

"The multibillion-dollar natural health products industry sells the perception that because its products are "natural," they must also be safe, such that comprehensive testing like that required for pharmaceuticals is not required," write guest author Dr. Stuart MacLeod with [CMAJ](#) editor Dr. Matthew Stanbrook and colleagues. "However, it is a near-universal truth that any substance that exerts a beneficial effect on a biological system will also have the potential for adverse effects."

Health Canada created the Natural Health Products Directorate 10 years ago, but the regulatory framework that governs it does not protect the consumer.

"All health claims for any product should be subject to a common set of regulations, starting with consistent and easily understood standards of evidence proportional to health risks and benefits," conclude the authors.

"Uniform regulations are the best way to protect consumers while still allowing choice."

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