

Natural health product regulation in Canada needs to go further to protect consumers

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Health Canada's proposed changes to natural health product regulation are a good step forward, but they need to go further to protect consumers, argues Dr. Matthew Stanbrook in an editorial in *CMAJ* (*Canadian Medical Association Journal*).

"Health Canada is poised to overhaul its regulatory system for natural [health](#) products, which is welcome and long overdue. However, there are troubling signs already that new regulations could be diluted past the point of potency," writes Dr. Stanbrook, Deputy Editor, *CMAJ*.

The proposed new regulations would hold nonprescription drugs and natural health products to the same standards based on the perceived risk of [adverse effects](#). However, direct evidence is needed to determine risk, and that can take time. Products later found to have adverse effects, such as a homeopathic product that supposedly contained diluted extract from the poisonous belladonna plant and was associated with several infant deaths in the United States, could not be suspended from sale under present regulations.

Dr. Stanbrook argues that natural health product producers should not be allowed to make additional claims without evidence to support them, that products should be labelled with disclaimers and that Health Canada must have the power to remove unsafe products from the market as well as other measures.

"Such measures are definitely needed, and Health Canada's perceived

hesitancy here is not reassuring," he writes.

He also states that stores selling natural health products should place them in their own section away from approved [nonprescription medications](#).

"The double standard perpetuated by both regulators and retailers that enables the deception of unsuspecting Canadians must end. Alternative medicines with claims based on alternative facts don't deserve an alternative, easy regulatory road to market—at the very least, they need to be moved to an alternative shelf," concludes Dr. Stanbrook.

More information: Matthew Stanbrook. Natural health products should be sold separately from drugs, *Canadian Medical Association Journal* (2017). [DOI: 10.1503/cmaj.170661](https://doi.org/10.1503/cmaj.170661)

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