

Formal Complaints against CNME-Recognized Programs or the Council

As a programmatic accrediting agency, the Council on Naturopathic Medical Education (CNME) is primarily concerned with the performance, improvement, and sustained effectiveness of naturopathic medicine programs. CNME normally does not intervene in the internal procedures of programs or institutions, nor does it serve as an adjudicatory or grievance-resolving body for individuals or groups. However, in accordance with requirements of the U.S. Department of Education, the CNME will review formal complaints against accredited or candidate naturopathic medical (ND) programs, or against CNME itself, that pertain to a program's or the Council's non-compliance/violation of CNME eligibility requirements, accreditation standards, and/or policies.

Generally, in the case of a complaint against a CNME-accredited or candidate ND program, the CNME recommends that the complainant first submit the complaint to the institution according to their complaint policy. However, the CNME does not require a complainant to engage in the institutional complaint process before submitting a complaint to the CNME if there are potential issues with—or concerns about—doing so.

Submission of Complaints

CNME strives to ensure that its complaint process is timely, fair, equitable, unbiased and readily available:

- Complaints may be submitted by multiple methods: postal mail, email, or phone.
- The CNME executive director is available for questions and consultation regarding the potential filing of a complaint.
- If a complaint is improperly filed, the CNME executive director will provide guidance to help the complainant correct and resubmit it.
- Complainants may request that their identity remain confidential from the institution, except where disclosure is legally required or necessary to prevent imminent harm.

Complaints against CNME-Recognized Programs

The following procedures apply to complaints against accredited or candidate programs:

1. **Initial Contact:** A complainant who contacts the CNME office for information on filing a complaint is provided a copy of this policy and guidance to submit the complaint in writing. The CNME executive director is available to discuss the complaint and provide guidance on submission requirements, and complainants are encouraged to have a preliminary discussion about the complaint before moving forward.
2. **Submission Requirements:** Complaints must:
 - i. Be in writing (note that in cases of an oral complaint communicated by phone or video-conference call, the CNME executive director is available to assist the complainant in drafting a written complaint, if requested);

- ii. Provide documentation/evidence regarding the matter complained about, including any decisions by the institution in regard to the complaint;
 - iii. Indicate non-compliance with CNME eligibility requirements, accreditation standards, or policies; and
 - iv. Be submitted within four years of the alleged occurrence(s).
3. **Acknowledgement:** CNME acknowledges receipt of written complaints within 10 business days and provides a copy of this policy. Status updates will be provided periodically during the review process.
4. **Initial Review:** Within 30 days of receipt of a written complaint, CNME informs the complainant whether the complaint is: (i) complete, (ii) lacking documentation, or (iii) outside CNME's scope. Incomplete complaints may be revised and resubmitted.
5. **Program Notification:** If a complaint is complete and meets requirements, CNME notifies the program within 45 days of receipt, requesting a written response within 30 – 60 days (the timeframe depends on the complexity of the complaint).
6. **Complaint Review Committee:** After receiving the program's response, the CNME executive director and president appoint a Complaint Review Committee of 2 or 3 Council members to review the documentation. The committee meets within 60 days of receipt of the program's response. Committee actions may include: dismissal, request for more information, hearing with parties, recommendations, focused visit, or referral to the full Council for review.
7. **Timeline for Resolution:** Complaints are normally resolved within 6 months of receipt of completed complaint; in any case, all complaints must be resolved within 12 months of receipt.
8. **Final Decision:** CNME sends written notice of the final decision to both complainant and program within 10 business days of the decision. The decision is final and not subject to appeal.
9. **Suspended/Lapsed Complaint:** If, prior to a final resolution of the complaint according to the process outlined above, the complainant ceases to communicate with the CNME or to provide requested information/materials, the CNME executive director may deem the complaint to be suspended or lapsed. A suspended or lapsed complaint can be reinstated by the complainant at any time.

Documentation and Recordkeeping

For any written complaint that is filed with the Council, the Council maintains an official record of the review process, including written materials that are submitted and a communications log. All actions, decisions, and outcomes are documented in the official record of the complaint review process.

Complaints against the Council

The following procedures apply to complaints made against CNME itself:

1. **Submission:** Complaints must be submitted in writing with supporting documentation and must relate to CNME eligibility requirements, accreditation standards, or policies. The CNME executive director is available to answer questions and provide guidance on how to draft a complaint and what other materials to submit.
2. **Acknowledgement:** CNME's executive director acknowledges receipt of the written complaint within 15 business days, and refers the matter to the executive committee.
3. **Executive Committee Review:** Within 60 days of receipt of the written complaint, the executive committee reviews the complaint and issues a written decision. If the committee determines that more information or documentation is needed in order to make a decision, it may request additional information or documentation before making a decision.
4. **Full Council Review:** If the complainant finds the decision inadequate, they may request review by the full Council at one of its next two scheduled meetings. Complainants may also request to address the Council directly; such requests are considered by the executive committee and are allowed at the committee's discretion.
5. **Decision:** At the conclusion of the review, the Council deliberates in closed session and issues a final written decision. The decision is final and not subject to appeal.
6. **Legal Action:** If the complainant initiates legal action at any time during the review of the complaint, CNME will suspend its review pending resolution of the litigation.
7. **Suspended/Lapsed Complaint:** If, prior to a final resolution of the complaint according to the process outlined above, the complainant ceases to communicate with the CNME or to provide requested information/documentation, the CNME executive director may deem the complaint to be suspended or lapsed. A suspended or lapsed complaint can be reinstated by the complainant at any time.