# **What is Integrative Medicine?**

### **The field of integrative health and medicine reaffirms the importance of the relationship between practitioner and patient, focuses on the whole person, is informed by evidence, and makes use of all appropriate therapeutic approaches, healthcare professionals and professions to achieve optimal health and healing. Simply put, integrative health and medicine offer best practices for optimal health and healing.**

## **A History of Definitions**

Many terms have been commonly used to describe this field over the past two decades. Alternative medicine was a term used to express approaches that were separate from conventional medicine. **Complementary and alternative medicine (CAM)** then became the preferred term, indicating a broad range of healing philosophies and approaches that were outside of conventional approaches but could be used as stand-alone alternatives or adjunctive approaches to conventional care. **Integrative medicine is a newer term that emphasizes the integration of CAM approaches with conventional medicine, and is the term that is preferred by educational and governmental institutions.**

## Buckminster Fuller wisely said “You never change things by fighting the existing reality. To change something, build a new model that makes the existing model obsolete.”**Why We Say Health & Medicine Instead of Just Medicine**

The AIHM community believes that integrative health care is inherently interprofessional. Medicine is but a section of the total picture of health care, highlighting the diagnosis, treatment, and prevention of disease. Because many health professionals do not diagnose or treat disease, we honor all health professionals in this work, and you will notice that we intentionally put health first — in front of medicine — to emphasize our focus on health first. Integrative Health & Medicine is the future of medicine, health, and wellness. Think of it as Integrative Medicine 2.0.

Buckminster Fuller wisely said, “You never change things by fighting the existing reality. To change something, build a new model that makes the existing model obsolete.” We are approaching this direction with Integrative Health and Medicine.

## **The Academy’s Role**

The AIHM was developed in 2013 as a solution to our growing health care crisis. We had often found ourselves repeating the popular quote, “We are the ones we’ve been waiting for.” The formation of the AIHM is a bold response to a call to action for change — to transform the way we think about health and health care. The Academy  is home to a broadening international community of healthcare practitioners, health seekers, and advocates connected by a shared holistic philosophy of person-centered care. The Academy Community recognizes the link between our health and the state of the planet and deeply considers the social determinants of health and the quality of our relationships to ourselves and one another.

An irony of the integrative health care movement is that we have an increasing abundance of integrative practitioners, yet they tend to operate separately from one another. Interprofessional communication, collaboration, education and team-based care are at the heart of the AIHM’s mission as we unite the many voices in integrative health and medicine to transform health care together.

## **A Game Changer**

The AIHM Interprofessional Fellowship offers a meaningful solution to the current siloed model of integrative health care. AIHM’s 1,000 hour hybrid online program with residential retreats and clinical immersion experiences is the first truly interprofessional fellowship in integrative health and medicine; fellows learn with and from one another, and represent multiple professional disciplines, including medical, osteopathic, naturopathic and chiropractic physicians; advanced practice nurses; registered nurses and direct entry midwives with a master’s degree or doctorate in a health related field; physician assistants; licensed acupuncturists; registered dieticians; dentists, pharmacists, psychologists; and licensed clinical social workers. Fellows will become change agents for their communities and expert communicators with professionals in other disciplines, thus paving the road to elevate interprofessional education and collaboration.

As the AIHM community and its influence grows, we anticipate the interprofessional model to expand dramatically, as true integration requires that we learn how to actually work together.

## **Usage Patterns, Patient Satisfaction and Cost Effectiveness of Integrative Health and Medicine**

We are all too aware of the staggering economic impact of the most common preventable chronic diseases. Integrative health and medicine focuses on prevention, high-quality partnerships among clinicians, a collaborative relationship between practitioners and patients/clients, and evidence-based therapies that are not only effective, but tend to improve health. These areas of focus may feel merely conceptual within a conventional framework, but they are the driving factors behind the success of an integrative health model. It is important to understand that integrative health is inclusive of conventional care; over 40% of hospitals offer at least some integrative services to inpatients, and integrative services are now becoming normalized in institutional and clinic settings.

It is clear that the appeal of integrative health and medicine to patients is escalating. Use of integrative health and medicine is as high as 90% for certain patient populations in the US and is 38% for all adult Americans. The most common conditions successfully treated are chronic pain, gastrointestinal disorders, depression/anxiety, cancer, and stress.

Importantly, HCAHPS (Hospital Consumer Assessment of Healthcare Providers and Systems) scores are higher when patients receive integrative services. In one study, 76.2% of patients who received integrative services for pain in the hospital felt their pain was improved as a result of the integrative therapy.  Health-related quality of life was significantly improved for patients who received integrative care. Treatments were also found to reduce blood pressure, decrease anxiety and pain, and increase patient satisfaction in thoracic surgery patients. Additional studies have corroborated the observation of reduced pain and anxiety in inpatients receiving integrative care.

Data from the Bravewell Collaborative demonstrated the efficacy of an integrative approach to health care derived from three sources: research conducted at universities, studies at corporations for employee wellness and pilot projects run by insurers. The research also revealed that significant health benefits can be realized by using three strategies: integrative lifestyle change programs for those with chronic illness, integrative interventions for people with depression and integrative prevention strategies for all.

One diabetes study found that every dollar invested in lifestyle intervention cut $3.50 in medical costs, while a review of more than 120 studies of comprehensive health management programs offered by employers revealed an average 26% reduction in health care costs and an average $5.81 returned for every $1 invested in worksite health promotion initiatives.

Additional research is anticipated to continue to confirm that integrative health and medicine support the triple aim to improve the experience of care, to improve the health of populations, and to reduce the per capita costs of health care.

## **A New Landscape: Integrative Curricula in Medical Institutions and a Groundswell of Interest from Conventional Practitioners**

The Academic Consortium for Integrative Medicine & Health now has 65 member medical schools and health care facilities that follow an integrative medicine curriculum. The Mayo Clinic, Allina systems, Duke University, the Cleveland Clinic, and many other major academic institutions have thriving integrative centers, while others continue to be built.

Courses for conventional medical practitioners are plentiful, both online and at live conferences. Integrative health and medicine is being increasingly recognized for its value and the true path it offers to both prevention and healing. Conventional practitioners are becoming accustomed to patients bringing their questions and interest to them regarding integrative services and are educating themselves accordingly to begin to meet their patients’ demands.

## **Your Role in Integrative Health & Medicine**

Health is more than the absence of disease. Health also means vitality, joy, and wholeness. Whether you identify yourself as a patient, a consumer, a practitioner, or an advocate, there is a role for you in promoting this work. The Academy believes that your health and medical providers should be your advocates. The moment has arrived for you to press your healthcare practitioner for integrative health and medicine. Usage trends are revealing that the supply of integrative services is increasing to meet the growing demand.

If you are seeking practitioners who practice integrative health & medicine, connecting with our community members through our [Find-A-Provider Directory](https://secure.aihm.org/np/clients/aihm/publicaccess/membershipDirectory.do?md=2) is a good place to start, as it includes our AIHM interprofessional practitioner community and active physician Diplomates of the American Board of Integrative Holistic Medicine (AIHM).

If you are a supporter and advocate of this movement, but not a health & medicine practitioner, please consider becoming a [Professional Affiliate member](https://www.aihm.org/membership/become-a-member/#1458848283708-0ee217b6-474f). You will part of a like-minded integrative community, expand your professional network, and learn new ways to think about and apply holism.

### **If you are a healthcare provider on the path to Integrative Health & Medicine, here are four ways to continue your growth, education, and training by connecting with the Academy.**