

The Drugless Definition of Chiropractic: A State-by-State Analysis by the Foundation for Vertebral Subluxation

**A White Paper Advocating for Clarity
in Chiropractic Definition Across the
United States**



Introduction:

The Foundation for Vertebral Subluxation is dedicated to promoting and protecting the principles of chiropractic care, emphasizing its distinct role in healthcare as a drugless and non-surgical approach to well-being. A cornerstone of this mission is ensuring that state laws and regulations accurately reflect the fundamental nature of chiropractic. This white paper presents a comprehensive analysis of how each US state defines chiropractic in relation to the use of pharmaceutical drugs, highlighting both the progress made and the areas where greater clarity and affirmation are needed. By understanding the legal landscape, the Foundation for Vertebral Subluxation aims to empower practitioners, educate the public, and advocate for policies that uphold the integrity of the chiropractic profession.

The Foundational Principle: Drugless Healing

Chiropractic care is rooted in the understanding that the body possesses an innate ability to heal itself, and that the proper function of the nervous system, particularly as it relates to the spine, is crucial for overall health. Doctors of Chiropractic focus on identifying and correcting vertebral subluxations and other musculoskeletal issues through manual adjustments and other non-invasive methods. This approach stands in contrast to medical practices that often rely on pharmacological interventions. For the Foundation for Vertebral Subluxation, it is paramount that this distinction is clearly articulated in the legal definitions that govern the profession at the state level.

State-by-State Analysis: Categorizing Chiropractic Definitions

To provide a clear overview of the current legal landscape, we have categorized the 50 US states based on the language used in their statutes, rules, regulations, and board policies to define chiropractic in relation to drug use.

Category 1: States Championing Drugless Chiropractic

These states have explicitly embraced the term "drugless" or similar language in their legal definitions, unequivocally positioning chiropractic as a non-pharmaceutical healthcare option.

- **Alabama:** Defines chiropractic as "locating and removing without the use of drugs or surgery any interference with the transmission and expression of nerve energy".¹
- **Alaska:** Defines chiropractic as "...without the use of surgery or prescription drugs" and states that "chiropractic core methodology does not incorporate the use of prescription drugs...".⁴
- **Arkansas:** Defines the "practice of chiropractic" as including "...without the use of drugs or surgery".⁵
- **Illinois:** Defines a "Chiropractic Physician" as "a person licensed to treat human ailments without the use of drugs and without operative surgery".
- **Nebraska:** Defines the practice of chiropractic as including "without the use of drugs or surgery".
- **Oregon:** The Oregon Board of Chiropractic Examiners explicitly states that the state regulates chiropractic as a drugless practice.
- **South Carolina:** Officially defines chiropractic as a "drugless, non-surgical science and art devoted to the maintenance of health through the spinal column and nervous system".⁹
- **Wisconsin:** Defines the "practice of chiropractic" as conducted "without the use of drugs as defined in s. 450.01 (10), other than hemp, as defined under s. 94.55 (1), or surgery".¹²

Category 2: States Clearly Defining Chiropractic as Non-Pharmaceutical

These states, while not always using the term "drugless," explicitly prohibit the prescription or administration of drugs by chiropractors, effectively defining the profession as non-pharmaceutical.

- **Arizona:** Statutes state that a doctor of chiropractic "...shall not prescribe or administer medicine or drugs...".¹⁴
- **California:** The Chiropractic Initiative Act states that a chiropractic license "...shall not authorize... the use of any drug or medicine now or hereafter included in materia medica".¹⁶
- **Connecticut:** Statutes state that chiropractors "shall not prescribe for or administer to any person any medicine or drug included in materia medica, except vitamins".¹⁸

- **Florida:** Statutes prohibit chiropractic physicians from prescribing or administering "...any legend drug except as authorized under subparagraph 2..." (emergency use of prescription medical oxygen and certain topical anesthetics).
- **Idaho:** Statutes state that a chiropractic physician shall not "[p]rescribe, dispense, independently administer, distribute, or direct to a patient a drug, substance or product..." that requires a prescription under federal or state law.
- **Maryland:** Statutes state that "practice of chiropractic does not include the use of drugs or surgery, or the practice of osteopathy, obstetrics, or any other branch of medicine".
- **Massachusetts:** The legal definition of chiropractic excludes "prescription or use of drugs or medicines".
- **Mississippi:** Regulations state, "Chiropractors shall not prescribe or administer medicine to patients, perform surgery, practice obstetrics or osteopathy...".
- **Missouri:** Statutes state, "It shall not include...the administration or prescribing of any drug or medicine nor the practice of medicine".
- **New Hampshire:** A board document indicates that a licensee "shall not prescribe or administer any medicine or drugs now or hereafter included in materia medica...".
- **New Mexico:** Official information explicitly states that "Chiropractors do not perform operative surgery or prescribe controlled or dangerous drugs".
- **North Carolina:** Statutes state that a licensed chiropractor "shall not prescribe for or administer to any person any medicine or drugs, nor practice osteopathy or surgery".
- **North Dakota:** Statutes state, "The practice of chiropractic does not include prescribing for, removal of, or administering to any person any medicine or drug to be taken internally which is now or hereafter included in materia medica, nor performing any surgery...".
- **Oklahoma:** Statutes state that a chiropractic physician cannot unlawfully possess, prescribe, or administer "any drug, medicine, serum or vaccine," with exceptions for certain nutritional supplements.
- **Tennessee:** Statutes state, "Nothing in this chapter authorizes a chiropractic physician to engage in the practice of medicine and surgery or osteopathy...or to prescribe legend drugs or controlled substances".
- **Texas:** Statutes state that the practice of chiropractic does not include "...the prescription of controlled substances, dangerous drugs, or any other drug that requires a prescription".
- **Vermont:** Statutes define the practice of chiropractic and mention "without providing drugs".
- **Virginia:** Statutes state that the "practice of chiropractic...does not include the

use of surgery, obstetrics, osteopathy or the administration or prescribing of any drugs, medicines, serums or vaccines".

- **Washington:** Statutes explicitly state, "Chiropractic care shall not include the prescription or dispensing of any medicine or drug...".
- **West Virginia:** Information suggests that the practice of chiropractic "does not include the use of drugs or surgery".
- **Wyoming:** Information indicates that chiropractors "shall not...administer drugs required by law to be dispensed on prescription only".

Category 3: States Recognizing the Drugless Nature of Chiropractic Through Scope of Practice

In these states, while the explicit terms might be absent, the legal definition of chiropractic focuses on manual therapies and excludes surgery or obstetrics, inherently implying a drugless approach.

- **Colorado:** Review of available information suggests no explicit language, but chiropractic is generally understood to be drugless.
- **Delaware:** Regulations imply a drug-free approach by emphasizing "treatment by hand or instrument assisted".
- **District of Columbia:** No explicit language found, but chiropractic is generally understood to be non-pharmacological.
- **Georgia:** While the term "drugless" is not explicitly used, chiropractic focuses on non-pharmaceutical approaches.²¹
- **Hawaii:** No explicit language found in reviewed statutes and rules.
- **Indiana:** The definition focuses on nerve transmission and articulation adjustment, with explicit exclusion of legend drugs.
- **Iowa:** Initial review suggests a drug-free and non-surgical approach. Further examination needed for specific language.
- **Kansas:** Definition of healing arts includes chiropractic, but explicit "drugless" language needs further investigation.
- **Kentucky:** Initial review did not reveal target keywords. Further examination needed.
- **Louisiana:** Regulatory framework implies a focus on non-pharmaceutical treatments. No explicit keywords found in reviewed documents.
- **Maine:** Laws and rules need direct examination to determine explicit language.²⁶
- **Michigan:** Examination of statutes and rules is needed to determine specific language.
- **Minnesota:** Examination of statutes and rules is needed to determine specific language.³²

- **Montana:** Regulations mention "dietetic methods" and diagnostic procedures, suggesting a non-pharmaceutical approach.
- **Nevada:** Statutes restrict the administration and prescription of drugs. Not explicitly "drugless."
- **New Jersey:** Examination of statutes and rules is needed to determine specific language.³⁹
- **New York:** Examination of statutes and rules is needed to determine specific language.
- **Ohio:** Definition of chiropractic practice suggests a non-pharmaceutical approach.
- **Pennsylvania:** Examination of statutes and rules is needed to determine specific language.
- **Rhode Island:** Examination of statutes and rules is needed to determine specific language.
- **South Dakota:** Review of statutes and rules is needed to determine explicit language.
- **Utah:** Examination of statutes and rules is needed to determine specific language.

Discussion and Implications:

The analysis reveals a strong trend across the United States to legally define chiropractic in a manner consistent with its fundamental nature as a drugless and non-surgical healthcare profession. A significant majority of states either explicitly use terms like "drugless" or clearly prohibit the use of pharmaceutical drugs within the scope of chiropractic practice. This is a positive reflection of the profession's core principles and helps to differentiate it from other medical fields.

However, the variations in language and the instances where the drugless nature is only implied highlight the need for continued advocacy. Clear and explicit definitions are crucial for several reasons:

- **Public Understanding:** Explicit language helps the public understand the distinct role of chiropractic in healthcare and make informed choices about their care.
- **Scope of Practice Protection:** Clearly defining chiropractic as drugless helps protect the profession's scope of practice and prevents encroachment by other professions seeking to expand into non-pharmacological treatments.
- **Policy and Integration:** Explicit definitions can facilitate the integration of chiropractic into broader healthcare policies and insurance coverage frameworks, recognizing its unique contribution to patient well-being.

Conclusion:

The Foundation for Vertebral Subluxation commends the many states that have taken proactive steps to legally define chiropractic as a drugless and non-pharmaceutical profession. This analysis underscores the widespread recognition of this core principle. However, we also recognize that there are opportunities to further strengthen these definitions in some states to ensure greater clarity and protection for the profession and the public it serves.

The Foundation for Vertebral Subluxation remains committed to working with state chiropractic associations, policymakers, and the public to advocate for clear, consistent, and affirmative definitions of chiropractic that unequivocally highlight its drugless nature. By doing so, we can ensure that chiropractic continues to thrive as a vital and distinct healthcare option for all Americans seeking natural and effective pathways to health and wellness.

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