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Across the world, traditional medicine (TM) is either the mainstay of health care delivery or serves as a complement to it. In some countries, traditional medicine or non-conventional medicine may be termed complementary medicine (CM). The WHA resolution on Traditional Medicine (WHA62.13), adopted in 2009, requested the WHO Director-General to update the WHO Traditional medicine strategy 2002-2005, based on countries’ progress and current new challenges in the field of traditional medicine. The WHO Traditional Medicine Strategy 2014-2023 thus reappraises and builds on the WHO Traditional Medicine Strategy 2002–2005, and sets out the course for TM and CM (T&CM) in the next decade.

T&CM is an important and often underestimated part of health care. T&CM is found in almost every country in the world and the demand for its services is increasing. TM, of proven quality, safety, and efficacy, contributes to the goal of ensuring that all people have access to care. Many countries now recognize the need to develop a cohesive and integrative approach to health care that allows governments, health care practitioners and, most importantly, those who use health care services, to access T&CM in a safe, respectful, cost-efficient and effective manner. A global strategy to foster its appropriate integration, regulation and supervision will be useful to countries wishing to develop a proactive policy towards this important - and often vibrant and expanding - part of health care.

Much has changed since the previous global strategy was published in 2002. More countries have gradually come to accept the contribution that T&CM can make to the health and well-being of individuals and to the comprehensiveness of their health-care systems. Governments and consumers are interested in more than herbal medicines, and are now beginning to consider aspects of T&CM practices and practitioners and whether they should be integrated into health service delivery. In order to meet this new demand, and in response to Resolution WHA62.13 on TM, WHO recently updated the objectives of the Traditional Medicine Programme.
The *WHO Traditional Medicine Strategy 2014-2023* will help health care leaders to develop solutions that contribute to a broader vision of improved health and patient autonomy. The strategy has two key goals: to support Member States in harnessing the potential contribution of T&CM to health, wellness and people-centred health care and to promote the safe and effective use of T&CM through the regulation of products, practices and practitioners. These goals will be reached by implementing three strategic objectives: 1) building the knowledge base and formulating national policies; 2) strengthening safety, quality and effectiveness through regulation; and, 3) promoting universal health coverage by integrating T&CM services and self-health care into national health systems.

Updating and enhancing the strategy has allowed WHO to acquire a better understanding of how to boost the global integration of T&CM into health systems. My hope is that it will provide Member States with a road map to achieving further success in their T&CM strategic planning.

I am very pleased to introduce the *WHO Traditional Medicine Strategy 2014-2023*. It is my conviction that it will be a valuable tool for governments, system planners and health practitioners and – most crucially – will benefit individuals seeking the right care, from the right practitioner, at the right time.

Dr Margaret Chan
Director-General
Acronyms used in this document

AFRO – WHO Regional Office for Africa

AMRO/PAHO – WHO Regional Office for the Americas/Pan American Health Organization

EMRO – WHO Regional Office for the Eastern Mediterranean

EURO – WHO Regional Office for Europe

IRCH – International Regulatory Cooperation for Herbal Medicines

PHC – Primary Health care

SEARO – WHO Regional Office for South-East Asia

UHC – Universal Health Coverage

WHA – World Health Assembly

WHO – World Health Organization

WIPO – World Intellectual Property Organization

WPRO – WHO Regional Office for the Western Pacific

WTO – World Trade Organization
Executive summary

Traditional medicine (TM) is an important and often underestimated part of health services. In some countries, traditional medicine or non-conventional medicine may be termed complementary medicine (CM). TM has a long history of use in health maintenance and in disease prevention and treatment, particularly for chronic disease.

The *WHO Traditional Medicine (TM) Strategy 2014–2023* was developed in response to the World Health Assembly resolution on traditional medicine (WHA62.13) (1). The goals of the strategy are to support Member States in:

- harnessing the potential contribution of TM to health, wellness and people-centred health care;
- promoting the safe and effective use of TM by regulating, researching and integrating TM products, practitioners and practice into health systems, where appropriate.

The strategy aims to support Member States in developing proactive policies and implementing action plans that will strengthen the role TM plays in keeping populations healthy. It seeks to build upon the *WHO Traditional Medicine Strategy 2002–2005*, which reviewed the status of TM globally and in Member States, and set out four key objectives:

- policy — integrate TM within national health care systems, where feasible, by developing and implementing national TM policies and programmes.
- safety, efficacy and quality — promote the safety, efficacy and quality of TM by expanding the knowledge base, and providing guidance on regulatory and quality assurance standards.
- access — increase the availability and affordability of TM, with an emphasis on access for poor populations.
- rational use — promote therapeutically sound use of appropriate TM by practitioners and consumers.
Despite significant progress made in implementing this strategy around the world, Member States continue to experience challenges related to:

- development and enforcement of policy and regulations;
- integration, in particular identifying and evaluating strategies and criteria for integrating TM into national and primary health care (PHC);
- safety and quality, notably assessment of products and services, qualification of practitioners, methodology and criteria for evaluating efficacy;
- ability to control and regulate TM and CM (T&CM) advertising and claims;
- research and development;
- education and training of T&CM practitioners;
- information and communication, such as sharing information about policies, regulations, service profiles and research data, or obtaining reliable objective information resources for consumers.

This new strategy document aims to address these challenges. It will require Member States to determine their own national situations in relation to T&CM, and then to develop and enforce policies, regulations and guidelines that reflect these realities. Member States can rise to these challenges by organizing their activities in the following three strategic sectors:

1. build the knowledge base that will allow T&CM to be managed actively through appropriate national policies that understand and recognize the role and potential of T&CM.

2. strengthen the quality assurance, safety, proper use and effectiveness of T&CM by regulating products, practices and practitioners through T&CM education and training, skills development, services and therapies.

3. promote universal health coverage by integrating T&CM services into health service delivery and self-health care by capitalizing on their potential contribution to improve health services and health outcomes, and by ensuring users are able to make informed choices about self-health care.

For each objective, the strategy identifies a number of actions to guide Member States, partners and stakeholders, and WHO. The strategy supports Member States in designing and implementing a strategic plan in accordance with their
own national capacities, priorities, relevant legislation and circumstances. Its aim is to assist Member States in determining and prioritizing their needs, to provide for effective delivery of services, to support appropriate regulations and policy development and to ensure that these products and practices are applied safely.

It is anticipated that WHO will initiate a review of the implementation of this strategy approximately halfway through its term. This midterm review will be important in ensuring that the strategy is still relevant and timely as WHO and its stakeholders move into the final five years of the forthcoming mandate.
1. Introduction

In many parts of the world, policy-makers, health professionals and the public are wrestling with issues regarding the safety, effectiveness, quality, availability, preservation and regulation of traditional and complementary medicine (T&CM). T&CM continues to be widely used in most countries, and its uptake is increasing rapidly in other countries. At the same time, interest in T&CM is expanding beyond products to focus on practices and practitioners. As a result, WHO carried out a comprehensive analysis of the current status of T&CM around the world and worked with experts to develop the WHO Traditional Medicine Strategy 2014–2023, which will address some of these important issues. To facilitate the understanding of this strategy, box 1 below provides a definition of traditional medicine (TM), complementary medicine (CM) and T&CM.

**Box 1: T&CM Definitions**

**Traditional medicine (TM):**
Traditional medicine has a long history. It is the sum total of the knowledge, skill, and practices based on the theories, beliefs, and experiences indigenous to different cultures, whether explicable or not, used in the maintenance of health as well as in the prevention, diagnosis, improvement or treatment of physical and mental illness. (http://www.who.int/medicines/areas/traditional/definitions/en/).

**Complementary medicine (CM):**
The terms “complementary medicine” or “alternative medicine” refer to a broad set of health care practices that are not part of that country’s own tradition or conventional medicine and are not fully integrated into the dominant health-care system. They are used interchangeably with traditional medicine in some countries. (http://www.who.int/medicines/areas/traditional/definitions/en/).

**Traditional and complementary medicine (T&CM):**
T&CM merges the terms TM and CM, encompassing products, practices and practitioners.
T&CM around the world

T&CM is widely used around the world and valued for a number of reasons. At the International Conference on Traditional Medicine for South-East Asian Countries in February 2013, the WHO Director-General, Dr Margaret Chan, stated that “traditional medicines, of proven quality, safety, and efficacy, contribute to the goal of ensuring that all people have access to care. For many millions of people, herbal medicines, traditional treatments, and traditional practitioners are the main source of health care, and sometimes the only source of care. This is care that is close to homes, accessible and affordable. It is also culturally acceptable and trusted by large numbers of people. The affordability of most traditional medicines makes them all the more attractive at a time of soaring health-care costs and nearly universal austerity. Traditional medicine also stands out as a way of coping with the relentless rise of chronic non-communicable diseases.”¹. Regardless of reasons for seeking out T&CM, there is little doubt that interest has grown, and will almost certainly continue to grow, around the world.

WHO support for T&CM

WHO’s mission is to help save lives and improve health. In terms of T&CM, WHO promotes these functions by:

- facilitating integration of T&CM into national health systems by helping Member States to develop their own national policies in this sector;
- producing guidelines for T&CM by developing and providing international standards, technical guidelines and methodologies for research into products, practices and practitioners;
- stimulating strategic research into T&CM by providing support for clinical research projects on its safety and effectiveness;
- advocating the rational use of T&CM through the promotion of its evidence-based use;
- and mediating information on T&CM by acting as a clearing-house to facilitate information exchange.

¹ Speech given by WHO Director-General, Dr Margaret Chan, at the International Conference on Traditional Medicine for South-East Asian Countries. New Delhi, India, 12-14 February 2013.
Evolution of the WHO TM Strategy 2014–2023

This document is intended to provide information, context, guidance and support to policymakers, health service planners, public health specialists, traditional and complementary medicine communities and other interested parties about T&CM, including products, practices and practitioners. It addresses issues in evaluating, regulating and integrating T&CM, as well as in harnessing its potential to benefit the health of individuals.

The WHO Traditional Medicine Strategy 2014–2023 updates and enhances the framework for action laid out in:

- the WHO Traditional Medicine Strategy 2002–2005 (2), the first strategy document ever prepared by WHO in this field;
- the traditional medicine sections of the WHO Medicines Strategy 2004–2007 (3);

This new strategy reviews the potential contribution T&CM can make to health, in particular health service delivery, and establishes priority actions for the period to 2023. This strategy is an effective and proactive response to the World Health Assembly Resolution on traditional medicine (1), which encourages Member States to consider T&CM as an important part of the health system and builds on the work introduced in the Beijing Declaration, adopted by the WHO Congress on Traditional Medicine in 2008.

This new strategy is an important document for Member States, T&CM stakeholders and WHO in positioning T&CM within countries’ health systems. The strategy highlights advances in T&CM research and development and recognizes the experience gained during implementation of the WHO Traditional Medicine Strategy 2002–2005 and the WHO medicines strategies mentioned above.
The need for a new strategy

WHO and its Member States believe it is important to update and enhance the strategy at this time for a number of reasons:

1) Continued uptake of T&CM

The public and consumers of health care worldwide continue to include T&CM in their health choices. This obliges Member States to support them in making informed decisions about their options.

2) T&CM has growing economic importance

T&CM is growing and expanding, particularly with respect to products bought in person or over the Internet. The T&CM sector now plays a significant role in the economic development of a number of countries. At the same time, with prevailing current global financial constraints, use of T&CM for health promotion, self-health care and disease prevention may actually reduce health-care costs.

3) The global nature of T&CM

T&CM products and practices from one region are used throughout the world to complement local health care service delivery, making T&CM a truly global phenomenon. This requires a new level of cooperation among Member States as the sector continues to work on defining and supporting access to safe products and practices.

4) Levels of education, accreditation and regulation of T&CM practices and practitioners vary considerably

In an increasingly globalized world, individuals move freely from country to country in order to live and work. Given this trend, a better understanding of T&CM practitioners is needed to ensure professional consistency and safety.

5) Recent advances in T&CM research and development

Since the release of the WHO Traditional Medicine Strategy 2002–2005, there have been significant advances in what is known about T&CM along with the development of technical standards and guidelines for organized health service delivery.
6) **Intellectual property**
As T&CM becomes more popular, it is important to balance the need to protect the intellectual property rights of indigenous peoples and local communities and their health care heritage while ensuring access to T&CM and fostering research, development and innovation. Any actions should follow the global strategy and plan of action on public health, innovation and intellectual property (5).

7) **Integration of T&CM into health systems**
As the uptake of T&CM increases, there is a need for its closer integration into health systems. Policy makers and consumers should consider how T&CM may improve patient experience and population health. Important questions of access as well as population and public health issues must be addressed.

This new strategy document reviews progress made worldwide since the *WHO Traditional Medicine Strategy 2002–2005*, including highlights of successes and emerging challenges, and provides a framework for action into the next decade which will strengthen T&CM globally.
2. Global progress

Since the launch of the first the *WHO Traditional Medicine Strategy 2002–2005* (2), there has been significant and steady progress in implementing, regulating and managing T&CM in most regions of the world. Although Member States acted on their own initiative, the original strategy document played an important role in supporting their efforts (Figures 1 and 2). Statistics on global progress have been extrapolated from the recent WHO Global Survey on T&CM and are based on the key indicators outlined in the *WHO Traditional Medicine Strategy 2002–2005* (2).

2.1 Policy and regulations

Many Member States have made great efforts to advance T&CM, some of which can be attributed to the implementation of the *WHO Traditional Medicine Strategy 2002–2005*. In recent years, Member States have established or developed national and regional policies and regulations to promote the safe and effective use of T&CM. WHO has developed technical guidelines and

**Figure 1:** Monitoring changes in country progress indicators defined by the WHO Traditional Medicine Strategy

![Bar chart showing progress indicators for T&CM policies and regulations from 1999 to 2012.]

Sources:
- a: Reference 2;
- b: Reference 3;
- c: Reference 6 and 7;
- d: Reference 4;
- e: Number of MS with TM policy: Combined data from: 1) an interim report of the second WHO global survey (mid-2012; with 129 survey and return) and 2) the 1st WHO global survey result (WHO, 2005);
- f: Number of MS regulating herbal medicines: Combined data from: 1) an interim report of the second WHO global survey (mid-2012; with 129 survey and return) and 2) the 1st WHO global survey result (WHO, 2005), 3) information on IRCH membership and 4) EU membership.
standards and organized trainings/workshops in support of Member States (http://apps.who.int/medicinedocs/en/cl/CL10/; see also Annex C). Figure 1 below shows the progress of Member States regarding established national policies on T&CM and national regulations on herbal medicines.

2.2 Practices

T&CM practices vary widely from country to country with certain practices (sometimes called modalities) regarded differently depending on the culture, understanding and accessibility of conventional medicine. A practice where significant progress has been made is acupuncture. Although acupuncture was originally a feature of traditional Chinese medicine, it is now used worldwide. According to reports supplied by 129 countries, 80% of them now recognize the use of acupuncture (Figure 2).

**Figure 2: The Use of Acupuncture by Member States**

Source: Interim data from 2nd WHO TRM global survey as of 11 June 2012.
2.3 Education and research

In order to improve the safe and qualified practice of T&CM, Member States have developed regulations on the quality, quantity, accreditation and education structures for T&CM practitioners, including practitioners of conventional medicine who use T&CM. Significant progress has been made in many. For example, the number of Member States providing high-level T&CM education programmes including Bachelor, Master and Doctoral degrees at university level has increased from only a few to 39, representing 30% of the surveyed countries (Figure 3).

In the African Region, TM knowledge and practices have been passed on orally among traditional health practitioners for many generations. In recent years, some countries have strengthened training programmes to develop the knowledge of traditional health practitioners. Furthermore, in some countries TM is included in university curricula for health profession students. For instance, various universities in the Economic Community of West African States, Democratic Republic of Congo, South Africa and Tanzania include TM in the curricula for pharmacy and medical students (8).

To support Member States in moving towards quality training, WHO has published a series of training guidelines and benchmarks (http://apps.who.int/medicinedocs/en/cl/CL10/; see also Annex C).
There has also been progress in setting up national research institutes in the field of T&CM across the world (Figure 4). The number of Member States reporting a national research institute for T&CM has increased significantly.