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# WHO Traditional Medicine Strategy 2002-2005



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This is the first global WHO Traditional Medicine Strategy. It was drafted following extensive consultation. However, given regional diversity in the use and role of traditional medicine, and complementary and alternative medicine, modifications may be necessary to take account of variations at regional levels. Additionally, it should be noted that difficulties persist in defining precise terminology for describing their therapies and products. The validity of related data is also frequently problematic. Methodologies used to collect data are often not comparable and parameters not clearly determined. The traditional medicine team at WHO Headquarters would therefore welcome comments on any of the data included in this strategy. They should be sent to: Dr Xiaorui Zhang, Acting Team Coordinator, Traditional Medicine, Department of Essential Drugs and Medicines Policy, World Health Organization, Avenue Appia 20, 1211 Geneva 27, Switzerland or emailed to: [zhangx@who.int](mailto:zhangx@who.int).

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A traditional medicine strategy is **relevant**:

Traditional medicine continues to play an important role in health care. In many parts of the world, it is the preferred form of health care. Elsewhere, use of herbal medicines and so-called complementary and alternative therapies is increasing dramatically. There is no single determinant of popularity. But cultural acceptability of traditional practices, along with perceptions of affordability, safety and efficacy, and questioning of the approaches of allopathic medicine, all play a role. In view of this broad appeal, the general lack of research on the safety and efficacy of traditional medicines is therefore of great concern.

A traditional medicine strategy is **urgently needed**:

International, national and nongovernmental agencies continue to make great efforts to ensure that safe, effective and affordable treatments for a wide range of diseases are available where they are most needed. WHO estimates, however, that one-third of the world's population still lacks regular access to essential drugs, with the figure rising to over 50% in the poorest parts of Africa and Asia. Fortunately, in many developing countries, traditional medicine offers a major and accessible source of health care. Use of traditional medicine in primary health care, however, especially in the treatment of deadly diseases, is cause for concern. An evidence-base supporting its safe and efficacious use has yet to be developed.

**A traditional medicine strategy has been developed:**

In response to these challenges, WHO has developed a strategy for traditional medicine to enable this form of health care to better contribute to health security. It focuses on working with WHO Member States to define the role of traditional medicine in national health care strategies, supporting the development of clinical research into the safety and efficacy of traditional medicines, and advocating the rational use of traditional medicine.

