

# Advancing universal health coverage through Traditional Medicine

79th World Health Assembly, Geneva, Switzerland, 18–23 May 2026

The 79th World Health Assembly (WHA79) is convening at a moment of intensified pressure on health systems worldwide. Persistent inequities, rising demand for care and constrained resources require **new and complementary approaches** that strengthen primary healthcare and advance universal health coverage.

Adoption of the **Global Traditional Medicine Strategy 2025–2034** during WHA78 was a landmark moment in building a shared vision for the way forward. At **WHA79**, Member States and partners will explore how to accelerate progress through **safe, effective, evidence-based and people-centred solutions** – in which Traditional Medicine (TM) has a critical role to play.

## Why Traditional Medicine matters

40–99% of people  
use TM as a source  
of healthcare

88% of WHO  
Member States  
report the use of TM

~ 50% of medicines  
originate from natural,  
plant-based sources

Yet

< 1% of global health  
research funding is  
dedicated to TM

## Key messages for WHA79

### 1 TM requires a strong evidence base

The widespread use of TM underlines the urgency of advancing science and research.

Priorities include:

- increased data to advance the evidence base for TM;
- investment in TM research;
- active development and responsible use of digital technologies and health innovations;
- use of relevant research methodologies and intellectual property rights; and
- strengthened expert collaboration across sectors.

### 2 Provision of quality-assured, safe and effective TM products must be supported by appropriate regulatory mechanisms

Strengthened regulatory systems are critical for public safety, reduced misconceptions and trust in TM.

Priorities include:

- appropriate participatory mechanisms, quality control measures, standards and labelling requirements to support the quality, safety and efficacy of TM products and services;
- regulatory mechanisms for practitioners that prioritize patient safety; and
- common norms and standards for qualifications, competencies and ethical conduct to ensure practitioners have the necessary knowledge and skills to deliver safe, effective care.

### 3 Quality-assured, safe and effective TM should be integrated across health systems

Integration of TM will create stronger health systems for all.

Priorities include:

- integration of TM into all the building blocks of a health system, covering all levels of healthcare across the care continuum and life course; and
- primary healthcare as a natural entry point for the integration of TM and a foundation of universal health coverage.

### 4 TM has cross-sector value and can empower communities

TM can address challenges across multiple dimensions, including health, culture, environment, and social and economic factors.

Priorities include:

- increasing awareness of the transformative potential of TM in health service and self-care policies and approaches; and
- engaging communities and stakeholders to inform governance and societal approaches, and maximize the contribution of TM to health and well-being, advancing health for all.

## Role of the WHO Global Traditional Medicine Centre

The WHO Global Traditional Medicine Centre is a global technical centre and WHO headquarters department, based in Jamnagar, Gujarat, India. It supports countries in harnessing the full potential of TM as a living science, grounded in ancient wisdom. The Centre works with Member States to operationalize the Global Strategy and translate commitments into action.

## Engage at WHA79

If you are part of a WHA delegation or stakeholder group you can:

▶ tell us about your experience of TM in your country;

▶ share TM innovations and commitments;

▶ support statements that advance Global Strategy goals; and

▶ share key messages through your social media networks and combat misinformation.

## Join us at WHA79 side events

### Traditional Medicine Innovation for Health Impact: Financing, Collaboration and Future Pathways

Tues 19 May 2026 • 16:00–16:45

Intercontinental Hotel

Chemin du Petit-Saconnex 7-9, Geneva

[Register to watch online](#)

This event brings together Member States, the private sector and academia to explore how TM innovations can be strengthened, financed and scaled to advance health equity, expand access and drive meaningful health impact. The discussion will focus on moving from innovation and evidence to implementation and system integration, while unpacking financing and policy barriers, collaboration models and practical pathways for scaling credible, community-rooted innovations.

### Traditional Medicine at the Nexus of Climate, Biodiversity and Land Restoration (Rio Conventions)

Thurs 21 May 2026 • 09:00–10:00

Health Diplomacy House

Rue Rothschild 28, Geneva

[Register to watch online](#)

This event aims to position TM as a vital bridge across the Rio Conventions, emphasizing their crucial role in linking health, ecosystem resilience and sustainable development. It will address the growing threats posed by climate change, biodiversity loss and land degradation to medicinal species, treatment efficacy and knowledge systems, and call for stronger recognition, protection and support to enable more effective and integrated implementation.

### Youth Leadership to Advance Traditional Medicine for Equity and Access

Thurs 21 May 2026 • 18:00–19:30

SDG Solution Space

Avenue de Secheron 15, Geneva

[Register to watch online](#)

This event aims to position youth as key drivers in advancing TM within global health systems, particularly in the context of equity, accessibility and sustainability. It will highlight the cross-sectoral relevance of TM at the intersection of climate action, biodiversity conservation and land restoration, while aligning with the Global Strategy.