

The Second World Health Organization Global Summit on Traditional Medicine: strategic commitments for evidence, integration, and implementation (2025–2034)

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The Second World Health Organization (WHO) Global Summit on Traditional Medicine took place in New Delhi, India, from December 17 to 19, 2025. It was jointly organized by the WHO and the Government of India under the theme “*restoring balance: the science and practice of health and well-being*.” This Summit represented a pivotal moment in the global discourse on health systems, uniting ministers, researchers, innovators, Indigenous Peoples, traditional medicine practitioners, and civil society representatives from over 100 countries. Approximately 800 participants attended in person, while 20 000 engaged online, with more than 3000 invitees present at the Opening and Closing Ceremonies.

The primary focus of the Summit was on scientific innovation, respectful knowledge exchange, and multistakeholder commitments aimed at accelerating the implementation of the WHO Global Traditional Medicine Strategy 2025–2034, which was adopted by the Seventy-Eighth World Health Assembly in 2025. During the Summit, the WHO conducted its inaugural Strategic and Technical Advisory Group (STAG) meeting on traditional, complementary, and integrative medicine, with Prof. Jian-ping Liu attending as the sole representative from Mainland China.¹ The establishment of the WHO STAG reflects the growing global capacity to apply scientific rigor to traditional medicine and represents a significant step toward implementing the WHO Global Traditional Medicine Strategy 2025–2034.² This new Strategy, which embodies cultural heritage alongside scientific foundations, aims to contribute to universal health coverage (UHC), resilient health systems, inclusive and sustainable economies, and the overall health and well-being of individuals and the planet.

In light of global political, legal, and normative frameworks—including the Alma-Ata and Astana Declarations on Primary Health Care; the United Nations General Assembly and WHO resolutions on UHC; the WHO Pandemic Agreement; the World Intellectual Property Organization Treaty on Intellectual Property, Genetic Resources, and Associated Traditional Knowledge; the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples; the Convention on Biological Diversity; and relevant provisions of the World Trade Organization Agreement on Trade-Related Aspects of Intellectual Property Rights—the Summit emphasized the restoration of balance in health and well-being through traditional medicine. Discussions encompassed various topics related to scientific innovation across plenary and parallel sessions, as well as the Discovery Experience. Participants also reflected on the Gujarat

Declaration from the First WHO Global Summit on Traditional Medicine (August 2023) and the Beijing Declaration from the World Conference on Traditional Medicine (December 2024). The ten-year WHO strategy, encompassing four main objectives, was thoroughly discussed at the Summit.

Drawing upon the evidence and innovations shared during the plenary and parallel sessions and the Discovery Experience, participants committed to the following actions, aligned with the four strategic objectives of the WHO Global Traditional Medicine Strategy 2025–2034, to ensure both immediate impact and sustained progress.

Objective 1: strengthening the evidence base for traditional medicine

Although 30%–80% of the global population relies on traditional, complementary, and integrative medicine (TCIM) for healthcare, less than 1% of Global Health Research Funds are allocated to traditional medicine. Participants pledged to implement the WHO Traditional Medicine Research Priorities Global Roadmap by expanding investments in research infrastructure and workforce capacity building. This includes the development of scientifically robust, pluralistic, epistemology-sensitive, and ethical research methods that incorporate whole-systems research, real-world evidence, and Indigenous and community-based methodologies. Evidence generation will prioritize public health needs and adhere to rights-based research governance to safeguard biodiversity, cultural resources, data sovereignty, and community rights, as well as to responsibly utilize digital technologies and artificial intelligence. Furthermore, this objective aims to advance traditional medicine through evidence-based clinical practice guidelines. To support this, participants committed to enhancing the WHO Global Traditional Medicine Library as a trusted, ethically governed global knowledge repository that promotes intellectual property protection, equitable access and benefit-sharing, and evidence-informed policies, practices, and education.

Objective 2: supporting safe and effective traditional medicine through appropriate regulatory mechanisms

In addition to achieving effective treatment and ensuring patient safety, the regulation of TCIM is expected to enhance equitable access to health services, improve practitioner competence, and foster recognition of qualifications and employability. The Summit addressed the practices and practitioners of traditional medicine, emphasizing its relevance in building resilient health systems through regulatory changes. Participants pledged to strengthen

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en coherent governance and regulatory systems for traditional medicine products, practices, and practitioners to ensure safety, quality, effectiveness, accountability, and public trust while respecting system diversity. They will advance regulatory science, adopt risk-based approaches, enhance pharmacovigilance, and promote regulatory cooperation, all aligned with Indigenous rights, primary care, and international agreements.

Objective 3: integrating safe and effective traditional medicine into health systems

Participants committed to incorporating safe and effective traditional medicine into national health systems, particularly within primary healthcare and UHC, in culturally respectful and person-centered approaches. Priorities include quality assurance, patient safety, the integration of TCIM methodologies into medical education and accreditation, workforce development, and interprofessional collaboration, underpinned by transparent, evidence-informed policy and financing decisions. In this context, China shared its long-standing experience in integrating traditional Chinese medicine with Western conventional medicine across education, clinical practice, and research.

Objective 4: optimizing cross-sector value through data, collaboration, and empowered communities

Participants committed to enhancing standardized, interoperable data systems for traditional medicine, including the use of WHO standards such as the ICD-11 traditional medicine module, to support monitoring, evaluation, and accountability. They pledged to promote meaningful leadership and participation among communities and Indigenous Peoples, acknowledging traditional medicine as an integral part of holistic health ecosystems connecting individuals, communities, and the environment.

Additionally, participants agreed to coordinate international, regional, and cross-sectoral actions to connect research institutions and regulatory agencies and address global gaps in investment, regulation, innovation pathways, and equitable access and benefit-sharing, while exploring collaborative global mechanisms to reduce fragmentation and mobilize inclusive impact.

Participants shared their experiences of utilizing traditional medicine to combat the COVID-19 pandemic, highlighting the importance of resilience in times of crisis through the collaboration of traditional medical systems in emergency, critical care, and public health challenges.

The Summit also emphasized the critical role of civil society in implementing the Strategy. The Traditional, Complementary, and Integrative Health (TCIH) Coalition, an international civil society organization and a global network of over 400 entities representing patients, practitioners, researchers, and educators across all six WHO regions,³ advocates for the safe, effective, and evidence-based integration of TCIM into health systems worldwide.

Following the adoption of the WHO Global Traditional Medicine Strategy 2025–2034 in May 2025, the TCIH Coalition assumed a convening role for civil society to support the Strategy's implementation. The Global Advocacy Roadmap (GAR), developed in preparation for the Second Global Summit on Traditional Medicine, consolidates civil society priorities aligned with the Strategy's objectives through qualitative and quantitative data collection and engagement. This process included eight regional consultations, a hybrid global workshop at the Third World Congress on TCIM in Rio de Janeiro, and an institutional review board-approved multilingual survey that gathered input from over 300 patients, practitioners, researchers, and policymakers across all WHO regions.

At the Second Global Summit on Traditional Medicine, the GAR was showcased as an example of how civil society can contribute to the implementation of the WHO Global Traditional Medicine Strategy in partnership

with Member States and the WHO. Moving forward, the GAR will continue to serve as a framework for supporting civil society engagement with national and regional priorities, guiding coordinated action, and strengthening collaboration with public institutions to promote evidence-informed integration of TCIM into health systems.

Moving forward together

Reaffirming the intrinsic, interconnected value of traditional medicine in restoring balance for individuals, societies, and ecosystems, participants committed to identifying priority actions for 2025–2027 to catalyze early progress and establish a foundation for the full implementation of the Global Traditional Medicine Strategy through 2034. Member States and partners will translate the Delhi Manifesto into time-bound national actions, supported by enhanced international collaboration, shared best practices, and collective accountability.

Participants affirmed the central role of the WHO, including the WHO Global Traditional Medicine Centre, in supporting the implementation of the Strategy, monitoring progress through country-led reporting, facilitating future global dialogues, and conducting a mid-term review in 2030. Collectively, these commitments position traditional medicine to optimally contribute to the health and holistic well-being of all people, as well as to the flourishing of the planet, through a One Health approach and a Planetary Health perspective.

The Second WHO Global Summit solidified traditional medicine's role on the global health agenda, successfully framing the discourse around evidence-based integration, innovation, and equity. The path ahead is complex and requires a delicate balance between embracing the cultural significance and potential health benefits of these ancient systems while steadfastly maintaining the principles of scientific rigor, patient safety, and ethical justice. The Summit should be viewed not as an endpoint, but as a crucial waypoint in navigating this challenging yet promising journey toward more inclusive and holistic healthcare for all. The true measure of its success will be reflected in the national policies, quality research, and equitable partnerships it inspires in the years to come.

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Use of AI Statement

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Declaration of Competing Interest

Prof. Jian-ping Liu is the co-editor-in-chief of *Evidence-Based Chinese Medicine and Technology Assessment*.

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