

Traditional Medicine: WHO Strategy



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Based on references from WHO
published documents

-Development and enforcement of policy and regulations;

Although most member states have issued regulations or policies for T&CM, only around 60% have regulated Herbal medicines; many countries still face challenges in monitoring advertisement for herbal medicines

-Integration, in particular identifying and evaluating strategies and criteria for integrating T&CM into national and primary health care (PHC);

This remains an important challenge worldwide; for example, for selected T&CM such as acupuncture, although most countries have acknowledged its practice, only 20% of countries integrated it as part of insurance coverage schemes

-Safety and quality, notably assessment of products and services, qualification of practitioners, methodology and criteria for evaluating efficacy;

Global data estimates that around 30% only of countries recognize and provide a university degree in T&CM and have elaborated regulations for providers of these services.

-Research and development;

Important progress was observed over the past decade whereby currently 73 countries has established T&CM research institutes, compared to only 19 ten years ago; however, more research is needed at global level, particularly in terms of safety and efficacy of T&CM;

The graph below summarizes the reasons stated by member states regarding challenges in regulating and integrating T&CM

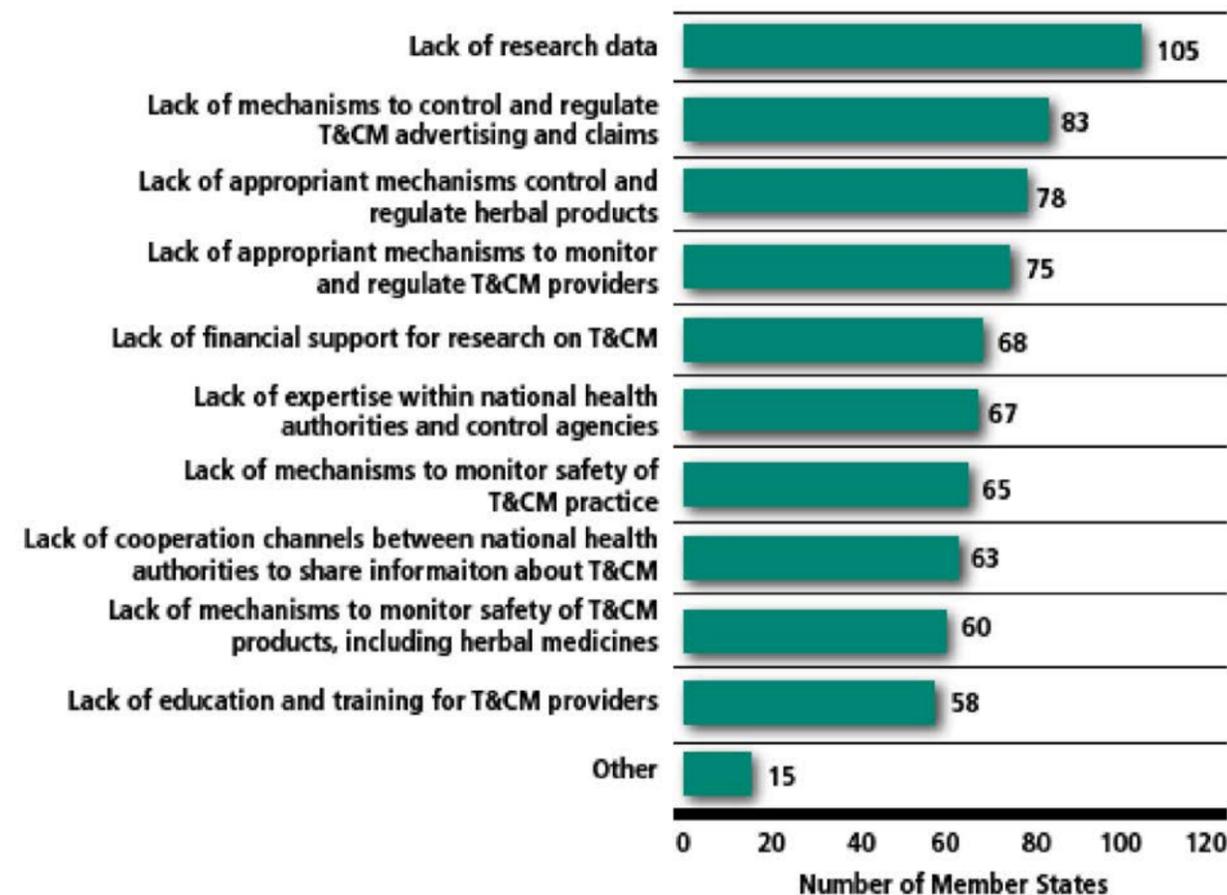
Graph1- reasons stated by member states regarding challenges in regulating and integrating T&CM

Traditional medicine includes many different practices and remedies, and varies from one country to another.

Traditional medicine is defined as the sum total of knowledge, skills and practices based on the theories, beliefs and experiences used by indigenous people from various cultures for health purposes be it health maintenance, prevention, diagnosis or treatment. Traditional medicine that has been adopted by other populations (outside its indigenous culture) is often termed alternative or complementary medicine; examples include acupuncture, reflexology, chiropractice, homeopathy, herbal medicines, reikki, etc...

Traditional medicine is often interchangeably used with Complementary Medicine, and commonly referred to as Traditional and Complementary Medicine (T&CM); T&CM remains widely used across the globe; it is estimated that around 9-65% of the populations in developing countries have used traditional medicine at some point in their lives, and in many Asian and African countries, 80% of people still depend on traditional medicine for initial primary health care; market size for T&CM and herbal products has reached more than 14 billion USD in China and close to 5 billion USD in western Europe in 2007.

However, Traditional and Complementary medicine have faced **several challenges** to name but the most common ones:



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

Facing these challenges, the WHO supported the establishment of **International Regulatory Cooperation for Herbal Medicines (IRCH)**

Box 1. International Regulatory Cooperation for Herbal Medicines (IRCH)

International Regulatory Cooperation for Herbal Medicines (IRCH) is a global network of regulatory authorities responsible for regulation of herbal medicines, established in 2006.

Its mission is to protect and promote public health and safety through improved regulation for herbal medicines.

Membership is open to any national regulatory authority responsible for the regulation of herbal medicines and regional/sub-regional bodies responsible for the regulation of herbal medicines

The WHO Traditional Medicine Strategy 2014-2023

The overarching goal of the WHO strategy for T&CM for 2014-2025 is to 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**:
 1- to support Member States in harnessing the potential contribution of T&CM to health, wellness and people centered health care
 2- 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;
- 3) promoting universal health coverage by integrating T&CM services and self-health care into national health systems.

As stated by Dr Maragret Chan, director General of WHO, "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." The WHO Traditional Medicine Strategy 2014-2025 " offers guidance to foster its appropriate integration, regulation and supervision for countries wishing to develop a proactive policy towards this important - and often vibrant and expanding - part of health care."



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