

The use of traditional medicine (TM) and complementary and alternative medicine (CAM) has increased significantly over the past few years. However, as recent reports have shown, in addition to the many benefits there are also risks associated with the different types of TM/CAM. Although consumers today have widespread access to various TM/CAM treatments and therapies, they often do not have enough information on what to check when using TM/CAM in order to avoid unnecessary harm.

In this context, it is necessary to develop information to meet the needs of consumers. These Guidelines will provide governments and other stakeholders with an overview of the general principles and activities necessary for the development of reliable consumer information. The document will also be a useful reference to consumers in guiding them on the information they need to have in order to choose a TM/CAM therapy that is safe and effective.

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WORLD HEALTH ORGANIZATION

# Guidelines on Developing Consumer Information on Proper Use of Traditional, Complementary and Alternative Medicine





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# Foreword

**D**uring the last decade, the use of complementary medicine (CM, referred to as CAM in the document) has increased in both developing and developed countries, and also within the Lombardy Region of Italy. Globalization has led to intercultural exchanges and widespread use of techniques and therapeutic products of CM often unknown to local communities. This phenomenon requires particular attention in order to avoid inadequate misunderstandings and inappropriate use that could be harmful to the individuals and subsequently affect entire communities.

For this reason, the Regional Government of Lombardy is focusing on the important and strategic sector of consumer protection, which has been considered as one of the priorities in economic health care planning as outlined in the

twenty objectives of the Government. This priority runs parallel to the most recent World Health Assembly Resolution on Traditional Medicine in 2003 which urged Member States of the World Health Organization to provide reliable information on traditional medicine (TM) and CM to consumers and providers in order to promote proper use. Therefore the Regional Government and the World Health Organization have established a four-year cooperation plan to develop technical guidelines and information on CM to help ensure the safety of consumers.

It is extremely important to create the conditions for the correct and appropriate use of CM methods which, if used correctly, can contribute to the protection and the enhancement of patients' health and well being. One such condition is the need to make sure that consumers are better informed and aware of CM strategies and treatments so as to enable them to make appropriate decisions on how to improve their health.

With this in mind, the Regional Government of Lombardy supported the development of the *WHO Guidelines on developing consumer information on proper use of traditional, complementary and alternative medicine* by outlining how governments and relevant non-governmental organizations can empower consumers to become active participants in the therapeutic choices for health care in the field of CM. The

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