

The **second WHO Global Summit on Traditional Medicine**, held in New Delhi, India, on 17–19 December 2025, has the theme of “Restoring balance: The science and practice of health and well-being”. The Summit aligns with the [Global Traditional Medicine Strategy 2025–2034](#), which recognizes Traditional Medicine as a living science that contributes to universal health coverage, health equity and sustainability. The Summit serves as a global platform to accelerate implementation of the new strategy, foster partnerships, and translate pledges and commitments into concrete action.



For more information, contact: tmcentre@who.int

Plenary 1

Restoring balance: The science and practice of health and well-being

Plenary 1 and associated parallel sessions will serve to anchor the Summit’s vision of balance across body, mind, community and the planet, as aligned with the Global Traditional Medicine Strategy 2025–2034 and global declarations.

This plenary session will open the technical deliberations of the second WHO Global Summit on Traditional Medicine, framing the Summit’s theme of “Restoring balance: The science and practice of health and well-being”. This opening plenary sets the stage by examining why imbalances in knowledge, access, governance and planetary health persist and what restoring balance could mean for societies today. Global leaders and experts will share bold perspectives on how diverse knowledge systems, scientific rigour, equitable governance, biodiversity stewardship and Indigenous rights contribute to restoring balance. The plenary also introduces emerging ideas for coordinated global action, including proposals such as a Global Consortium on Traditional Medicine and Innovation to support implementation of the Global Traditional Medicine Strategy 2025–2034. It is a key moment to emphasize that restoring balance is not only a philosophical ideal but an urgent necessity for global health, justice, ecological resilience and planetary survival. The narratives that emerge will resonate across the Summit and inform subsequent policy deliberations and public discourse.

Rationale

Many cultures and Traditional Medicine systems understand health as a dynamic state of balance both within individuals and between individuals, their communities and the environment (1–4). Despite this universality of understanding, personal, social and ecosystem imbalance has increasingly become the norm due to an array of global forces, from the deleterious effects of colonialism, industrialization, globalization and hyper-individualization to the destruction wrought by environmental degradation, biodiversity collapse and the climate crisis (5–8). These forces have also produced structural and historical inequities in whose knowledge is valued, whose rights are protected and who benefits from traditional knowledge systems. Imbalance is further reflected in inequities within health systems – in governance, resource allocation, access to services and health outcomes (9). Consequently, there is growing recognition of the urgent need for a *rebalance* between people and the communities and ecosystems in which they live (8,10,11).

Restoring such balance requires a vision of human, societal and ecosystem health that is holistic and interconnected, regenerative and relational, ethical and grounded in a sense of responsibility to future generations and to the planet (2,3). Traditional knowledge paradigms, and the role played by Traditional Medicine within them, are uniquely poised to contribute to this rebalancing (12). Achieving this, however, requires strengthening system-wide governance, scientific validation, evidence ecosystems and equitable benefit-sharing frameworks that uphold Indigenous rights, data sovereignty and guardianship of knowledge. Countries across the world are advancing new governance, research and regulatory models that demonstrate how balance can be operationalized in practice. Recentring Traditional Medicine as a potential catalyst for healthy people and healthy ecosystems requires a commitment to inclusive governance, evidence-informed policy, equitable access and benefit-sharing, and the integration of traditional knowledge with modern science and technology. These interconnected perspectives form the foundation of this plenary, which establishes the conceptual and ethical framing required for the Summit’s subsequent technical deliberations.

Objectives

- Establish the conceptual and ethical framing of “restoring balance” in health.
- Highlight historical and systemic drivers of imbalance across sectors.
- Feature governance models and rights-based approaches that enable balanced, equitable and culturally grounded health systems.
- Emphasize the interdependence of human and planetary health, including biodiversity stewardship and ecological balance.
- Inspire participant engagement with the Summit’s pluralistic vision.

Guiding questions

1. **Meaning and nature of balance:** What does balance in health and well-being mean across civilizations, cultures and knowledge systems, and why has imbalance become the global norm?
2. **Origins and persistence of imbalance:** How did imbalances in knowledge, power, choices and governance arise, why do they persist despite decades of global health progress, and what are their associated costs?
3. **Restoring balance between people and planet:** In an era of planetary crisis, how do we restore balance between human health and the ecosystems that sustain life?
4. **Building futures of balance:** What bold actions, innovations and governance models can restore balance in health, knowledge, access, biodiversity stewardship and benefit-sharing?

Session format

The proposed session format begins with a conceptual framing that introduces the themes of balance, imbalance, structural forces and the need for coordinated global action informed by the Global Traditional Medicine Strategy 2025–2034. This is followed by a series of keynote presentations offering diverse regional, scientific and Indigenous viewpoints. These keynotes will highlight Ayurveda’s holistic concept of balance and India’s leadership in evidence, governance and biodiversity stewardship; China’s approach to integrating Traditional Medicine into universal health coverage and regulatory systems; scientific validation, research networks and Africa’s leadership in knowledge stewardship; Indigenous perspectives on rights, guardianship of knowledge and restoring historical balance; and planetary health, Indigenous knowledge and the interdependence of ecological and human well-being. A moderated roundtable with the keynote speakers will then synthesize insights, encourage cross-disciplinary reflection and engage onsite and online participants. The moderator will summarize key themes and messages, and each speaker will then offer a one-minute closing focused on bold actions, innovations and governance models that can restore balance in health, knowledge, access, biodiversity stewardship, benefit-sharing and planetary well-being.

References

1. WHO global report on traditional and complementary medicine, 2019. Geneva: World Health Organization; 2019 (<https://iris.who.int/handle/10665/312342>).
2. AERAS. A rhizomatic review of traditional medicine: evidence across four realms. Geneva: World Health Organization; Forthcoming.
3. Kumar P, Pratt B. Traditional medicine and healthy ecosystems for holistic health and wellbeing: synergies and shared values – A report for the WHO Global Traditional Medicine Centre. Geneva: World Health Organization; Forthcoming.
4. Kuruvilla S, Gopalakrishna Pillai GK, Kim S, McDougall L, Cheng Soon G, Matsabisa M et al. Traditional medicine and its contributions to science, health equity and sustainability. *Bull World Health Organ.* 2025;103:642–642A. doi:10.2471/BLT.25.295061.
5. Horton R, Beaglehole R, Bonita R, Raeburn J, McKee M, Wall S. From public to planetary health: a manifesto. *Lancet.* 2014;383:847.
6. Myers SS. Planetary health: protecting human health on a rapidly changing planet. *Lancet.* 2017;390:2860–2868.
7. Whitmee S, Haines A, Beyrer C, Boltz F, Capon AG, de Souza Dias BF et al. Safeguarding human health in the Anthropocene epoch: report of The Rockefeller Foundation–Lancet Commission on planetary health. *Lancet.* 2015;386:1973–2028.
8. Convention on Biological Diversity. Decision 15/4: Kunming–Montreal Global Biodiversity Framework. Montreal (Canada): United Nations Environment Programme; 2022 (<https://www.cbd.int/doc/decisions/cop-15/cop-15-dec-04-en.pdf>).
9. Kickbusch I, Szabo MMC. A new governance space for health. *Glob Health Action.* 2014;7:10.3402/gha.v7.23507. doi:10.3402/gha.v7.23507.
10. Seifert G, Boujnah H, Ghods R, Wieland S, Aginam O, Chuthaputti A et al. Promoting planetary health and well-being for all: harnessing Indigenous knowledges for health with traditional, complementary and integrative health systems. *Front Med (Lausanne).* 2025;12:1543687.
11. Global traditional medicine strategy 2025–2034. Geneva: World Health Organization; 2025 (Health Systems Performance Assessment (HSPA) toolkit for universal health coverage).

12. Redvers N, Celidwen Y, Schultz C, Horn O, Githaiga C, Vera M et al. The determinants of planetary health: an Indigenous consensus perspective. *Lancet Planet Health*. 2022;6:e156–e163.