

Press release of 16 June 2017

Complementary medicine in Switzerland now a mandatory health insurance service

The Swiss Federal Government announces that specific medical services using complementary medicine are to be covered by mandatory health insurance (basic insurance). The Swiss Umbrella Association for Complementary Medicine and the Union of Associations of Swiss Physicians for Complementary Medicine welcome this decision. It implements one of the key demands of the constitutional referendum held on 17 May 2009. With this decision, the Swiss Federal Council is acknowledging that complementary medicine in Switzerland meets statutory regulations when it comes to effectiveness, guaranteeing high quality and safety.

At the 17 May 2009 constitutional referendum, the Swiss people voted in favour of complementary medicine being included in public healthcare by a two-thirds majority. A key requirement of the new constitutional article 118a on complementary medicine is that mandatory health insurance (basic insurance) also has to cover specific services using complementary medicine.

It is now decided that the following disciplines of complementary medicine will be fully covered by mandatory health insurance (basic insurance) as of 1 August 2017: anthroposophical medicine, classical homoeopathy, traditional Chinese medicine and herbal medicine, provided that these are practised by conventional medical practitioners who have an additional qualification in one of the four disciplines as recognised by the Swiss Medical Association (FMH).

The Swiss Federal Health Insurance Act (HIA, 1996) together with constitutional article 118a provide everyone with access to complementary medical services (according to the solidarity principle). Despite these regulations, the implementation was followed by several years of controversy about how to cover the costs of complementary medical services. Scientific programmes commissioned by the government were abused for political ends, meaning that, for a while, such services were no longer covered.

With today's decision, the Swiss Federal Government is finally acknowledging that complementary medicine meets the regulations of the HIA when it comes to effectiveness, guaranteeing high quality and safety. By law, only those services that are effective, appropriate and cost-effective (art. 32 of the requirements of the Federal Act on Health Insurance) can be covered.

The government's decision is important for any person or family that cannot afford private supplementary insurance and for people with indications for which the only available options in conventional medicine carry a higher potential risk.

The Swiss Umbrella Association for Complementary Medicine and the Union of Associations of Swiss Physicians for Complementary Medicine are pleased with the Federal Council's policy decision to strengthen support for complementary medicine in basic medical care.

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The Swiss Umbrella Association for Complementary Medicine

The Swiss Umbrella Association for Complementary Medicine campaigns for the recognition of complementary medicine within the Swiss healthcare industry. The association was set up in 2009 to implement the core requirements associated with constitutional article 118a:

- To promote integrative medicine (cooperation between conventional and complementary medicine)
- To include complementary medicine disciplines as practised by physicians in basic insurance and other forms of social insurance (Suva accident insurance, military and disability insurance)
- To promote teaching and research
- To establish national qualifications and cantonal professional licensing for non-medical therapists
- To ensure the availability of a variety of therapeutic products

The founding members include associations of physicians and therapists, hospitals, schools, health organisations, the Swiss druggists' association and the manufacturers' association for complementary medical products and therapeutic products of plant origin.

The Union of Associations of Swiss Physicians for Complementary Medicine

The Union has been successfully campaigning for complementary medicine as practised by physicians to be recognised within the healthcare industry since 1996 and calls for complementary medicine to be afforded equal status in practice, teaching and research. It is committed to making complementary medicine a fundamental part of basic medical healthcare and promotes cooperation between the affiliated associations of physicians.