

1. Editorials

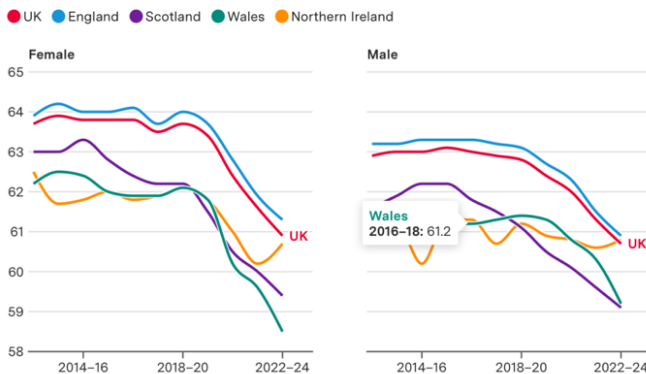
1.1. To Improve UK Healthy Life Expectancy, Widen the Lens

A recent data analysis by the Health Foundation, entitled [Healthy life expectancy trends in the UK: a watershed moment](#), reveals a stark reality: the UK has experienced steep declines in healthy life expectancy over the past decade.

By 2021, the UK ranked 20th out of 21 peer countries – ahead only of the United States.

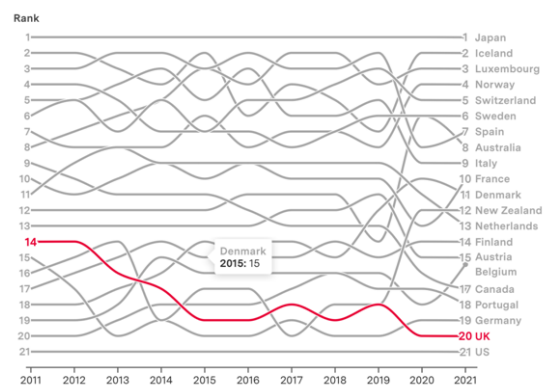
England, Scotland and Wales experienced steep declines in healthy life expectancy in the past decade

Years of healthy life expectancy at birth by country and sex, 2012–24



The UK's healthy life expectancy ranked 20th out of 21 peer countries in 2021 down from 14th a decade before

Ranking of healthy life expectancy at birth for both sexes in the UK vs 20 high-income peer countries, 2011–21

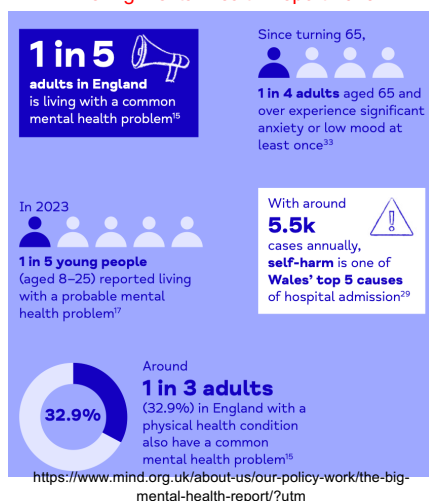


Paradoxically, the USA and the UK are widely regarded as the leading superpowers in modern health science. According to the [2026 QS World University Subject Rankings](#), these two Anglo-Saxon nations each have five universities in the global top ten for life sciences and medicine.

So here is the puzzling question: why have these world-leading positions in health science not translated into better health outcomes for their own citizens?

The Big Mental Health Report 2025 shows that mental health problems are common in the UK. An analysis of the *UK Understanding Society* survey indicates that the declining healthy life expectancy in the UK is primarily due to worsening mental health.

The Big Mental Health Report 2025

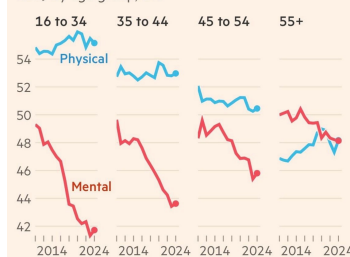


The problem with healthy life expectancy.

John Burn-Murdoch. *Financial Times*. 2 May 2026

Falling healthy life expectancy is primarily about worsening young adult mental health; physical health is stable or rising for all

Average physical and mental functioning scores (0–100) by age group, UK



<https://www.ft.com/content/766ee31-d73d-441d-8772-6fd426d2b7e2>

Hence, it's time to adopt a holistic approach integrating body and mind, a feature of traditional Chinese medicine (TCM) and many other traditional medicine, as highlighted by the [WHO Global Traditional Medicine Strategy 2025–2034](#) and a [Lancet World Report](#).

Indeed, it is time we integrate the wisdom of all peoples to catalyse innovation. The new WHO Traditional Medicine Strategy makes this imperative clear through its definition of integrative medicine: an interdisciplinary and *evidence-based* approach to health and well-being. It calls on Member States to integrate safe, *evidence-based* traditional, complementary and integrative medicine (TCIM) into their health systems.

So, where does the NHS stand on this issue today? The NHS does not have a single, coherent national strategy for TCIM. Instead, we have a patchwork:

- ✓ **Local innovation:** Some Integrated Care Boards commission services such as acupuncture for chronic pain, but availability remains a postcode lottery.
- ✓ **National guidance:** NICE recommends some TCIM interventions, yet national NHS policy remains largely hands-off or discouraging for most.
- ✓ **Legal frameworks:** A few professions (e.g., chiropractic, osteopathy) are regulated, but this does not guarantee NHS provision.

This approach looks increasingly outdated. The [evidence base](#) for several TCIM modalities, including acupuncture and certain herbal treatments, is evolving rapidly, and public demand for integrative, person-centred options is growing.

So, our question is this:

Is it time for the NHS to formally review its position on TCIM?

Not to endorse everything, but to develop a rational, *evidence-based* framework that:

- ◆ Identifies what works for specific conditions and what deserves further research
- ◆ Supports research to strengthen the evidence base
- ◆ Ensures efficacy and safety through clear guidelines and standards
- ◆ Reduces the postcode lottery by enabling informed, consistent local commissioning

Moving forward, universities and university health partners will have important roles to play. At King's, we have been *painstakingly* working on the King's Centre for Integrative Chinese Medicine ([King's CICM](#)) initiative, aiming to establish an academic hub to enable integrative medicine, by seamlessly blending the distinct wisdom, resources and expertise of TCIM, particularly TCM, into tomorrow's health education, training and care. Through multi-dimensional collaboration, we aim to catalyse scientific and clinical innovation and improve patient outcomes in the UK and worldwide.

In conclusion, the trajectory of healthy life expectancy in the UK (and the USA) is deeply concerning, but it's never too late to mend the fold, even after some sheep have been lost. A crisis like this could represent a fleeting historical opportunity for transformative changes born of precarious times.

Thanks to this wake-up call, if we seize the opportunity, broaden our horizons, learn with humility, and integrate the wisdom, resources and expertise of all peoples, we can surely look forward to a brighter future: one where stronger health sciences help build **a healthier UK and a healthier world**.

1.2. UK vs Germany: Should Britain Keep Ignoring Herbal Medicine? 🤖

In a [thought-provoking article](#) entitled *Herbal Medicine Use in the UK and Germany and Pharmacy Practice – A Commentary*, King's CICM Honorary Advisors [Prof Michael Heinrich](#) (UCL), [Dr Sukvinder Kaur Bhamra](#) (University of Kent), and their British and German co-authors put the spotlight on the markedly different systems for herbal medicine regulation and practice in European countries such as Germany and the UK.

Meanwhile, thousands of herbal medicinal products have been approved by the European Medicines Agency as legal medicinal products across Europe ([EMA report](#)).

🇩🇪 In Germany:

- ✓ Herbal medicines are widely integrated into medical and pharmacy education.
- ✓ Doctors regularly prescribe them, and pharmacies dispense them with confidence.
- ✓ Patients receive informed advice as part of standard care.

🇬🇧 In contrast, the UK:

- ✗ Medical and pharmacy curricula largely **lack** content on herbal medicine.
- ✗ Herbal medicines are **rarely** prescribed by doctors or distributed via pharmacies.
- ⚠ Most doctors and pharmacists are **not sufficiently knowledgeable** to advise patients appropriately on herbal use.

So here is our question for educators, policymakers and healthcare leaders:

🏛 What should the future look like for medical and pharmacy education in the UK?

🏛 And could **King's College London** play a role in shaping that future?

Let's start the conversation...

2. King's CICM Activities:

2.1. Warm Congrats to Guy's Hospital on Its Tercentenary! A teaching hospital of King's College London, Guy's Hospital is a core member of King's Health Partners. In early May, the hospital marked its 300th anniversary with [a grand celebration](#) – a particular highlight was [an official visit](#) to the Guy's Cancer Centre by **His Majesty King Charles III**, King's College London's Royal Patron, escorted by **Professor Shitij Kapur**, President of the University.

It is worth noting that **Dimbleby Cancer Care**, where our King's CICM faculty member **Mandy Brass** has [established an NHS acupuncture service for cancer patients](#), is located right at the entrance to Guy's Cancer Centre.



His Majesty (middle) at Guy's, with **Prof. Shitij Kapur**, President of King's College London (right), and **Prof. Sheila Singh**, Head of the Cancer Centre

2.2. Warmest congratulations to Professor Thomas Efferth, Honorary Advisor to King's CICM, on receiving the *8th Cheung On Tak International Award for Outstanding Contribution to Chinese Medicine*. On 28 April morning, Hong Kong Baptist University published a [press release](#) on the prize, which was jointly awarded to **Prof Thomas Efferth** and **Prof Yuandong Shen**. The awards ceremony took place at Hong Kong Baptist University on 23rd April 2026.

[Professor Efferth](#) is Director of the Institute of Pharmaceutical and Biomedical Sciences, Johannes Gutenberg University, Germany, and Editor-in-Chief of *Phytomedicine*. [Professor Shen](#) is affiliated with Shanghai University of Chinese Medicine and chairs ISO/TC 249 – the Traditional Medicine Committee of the International Organization for Standardization.



Professors **Yuandong Shen** and **Thomas Efferth** (Right)
at the awards ceremony in Hong Kong

2.3 Our PhD student [Ms Lu Chen](#) published a systematic review on [communication research within traditional Chinese medicine](#). Co-authored by [Dr Deborah Chinn](#) (Florence Nightingale Faculty of Nursing, Midwifery and Palliative Care) and [Dr Chris Tang](#) (Faculty of Social Science & Public Policy), the paper is published in *Health Communication*, a leading journal of the field.

2.4. International best practice guidelines play a key role in ensuring the quality and integrity of herbal medicine research. To facilitate Chinese scientists in accessing and applying these resources, King's CICM Honorary Advisors, Professor [Xuanbin Wang](#) (People's Hospital, Hubei University of Medicine, China) and Professor [Michael Heinrich](#) (University College London, UK), have joined forces with Professor [Hongxi Xu](#) (Shanghai University of Chinese Medicine) to lead the development of a review titled 'International Best Practice Guidelines for Chinese Medicine Research' ([中药研究的国际最佳报告指南综述](#)). This important review was published today in a leading Chinese journal, *Chinese Traditional and Herbal Drugs* 《中草药》.

King's CICM is proud to have facilitated this fruitful collaboration.

2.5. In- and outreach

- Two LinkedIn posts discussing "[Integrative Medicine in the NHS](#)" and "[UK's Healthy Life Expectancy Trajectory calling for Broader Perspective](#)", which are covered by *Editorial 1.1*, have attracted **over 800 impressions, a dozen likes** and lively discussion. Posts on King's Community, a forum for King's faculty and students, have attracted **over 700 reads**.
- A LinkedIn post on "[Ignored Herbal Medicine in UK Pharmacy & Medical Training](#)", a topic covered by *Editorial 1.2* has attracted **~2,400 impressions, 30 likes, 5 reposts** and lively discussion. A similar post on *King's Community* have attracted **over 800 reads**.

2.6. A full list of our activities can be followed here:

- King's CICM activities: <https://www.kingscicm.org/?p=1476>
- 中心活动与动态: <https://chinese.kingscicm.org/?p=1563>

3. Visit our updated homepage:

3.1. English homepage: <https://www.kingscicm.org>

- **Explore** a series of [*King's CICM Introductory Presentations*](#) (The 38th edition), outlining our theoretical foundation, track record, team structure, research focus and development timeline;
- **Download** the [*King's CICM Handbook*](#) (The 103rd edition), a comprehensive guide detailing the initiative's background, strategic blueprint, team and leadership structure, fundraising campaign and future priorities.

3.2. Chinese homepage (中文官网): <https://chinese.kingscicm.org>

- 浏览[中心简介幻灯稿](#)，了解我们的理论与实践、团队构架、研究重点与发展时间表
- 下载[中心手册](#)，它全面阐述中心的背景、战略蓝图、组织结构、发展计划与优先领域

4. We are what we share: https://www.kingscicm.org/?page_id=71

分享塑造你我: https://chinese.kingscicm.org/?page_id=71

5. Our JustGiving Campaigns:

- **The King's CICM Fund**—honouring unsung heroes & advancing core research: <https://www.justgiving.com/page/kings-cicm-fund>
- **The Peter Houghton Award**—supporting young herbal medicine scientists: <https://www.justgiving.com/page/prof-peter-houghton-award>
- **The Peter Hylands Award**—supporting young tech-driven TCM researchers: <https://www.justgiving.com/page/peter-hylands-award>
- **The Man Fong Mei Award**—supporting truly cross-disciplinary projects: <https://www.justgiving.com/page/man-fong-mei-award>
- **The Boying Ma Award**—supporting medical history & humanities: <https://www.justgiving.com/page/boying-ma-award>

With warm regards,

Dr Qihe Xu & Professor Yanzhong Wang

Co-Directors, King's CICM, King's College London.

<https://www.kcl.ac.uk/research/kings-cicm>