

# Public health ethics for complementary and alternative medicine

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## Abstract

Cambrella (2010–2012), a EU-funded project on complementary and alternative medicine focused on, amongst other topics, EU citizens' needs and attitudes to complementary and alternative medicine (CAM). Three important themes relating to this topic were identified: citizens' access to CAM in European countries, particularly given the marginalized position of CAM in most European countries; citizens' access to information regarding CAM, as a critical means of facilitating appropriate and safe CAM use; and quality of care was considered of equal importance in relation to CAM and conventional medicine. These themes were explored in a previously published review of research-based literature of citizens' needs and attitudes regarding CAM in the EU and associated countries. In this article, we draw on theoretical considerations of public health ethics to examine some of the ethical issues which arise from pertinent findings from this previously published study. Public health ethics is concerned with social justice and equity in health, the need to respect individual autonomy, and the obligation to prevent harm. The explorations presented here draw attention to multiple dilemmas and tensions concerning the public health ethics of CAM. We argue that public health ethics pertains to CAM as it does to other forms of healthcare. Given the complexity of public health ethics, we suggest that this field should be explored further in relation to CAM.

**Keywords:** Citizens; Public health ethics; Information; Access; Quality of care; Complementary and alternative medicine; Europe