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Thailand

Health Roadshow

Better Health Today for Tomorrow



Key takeaways from EU-ABC's
4th Health Roadshow

Opening Remarks

SPEAKER



Mr. Santi Promphat
Deputy Minister of Public Health

Key takeaways:

- Thailand has embarked on an ambitious 20-year national public health strategy to be achieved by 2036. Four key areas of excellence to ensure the efficiency and effectiveness of Thailand's public health operations are highlighted in the strategy, namely (1) health promotion, disease prevention, and consumer protection; (2) service delivery; (3) personnel management; and (4) good governance.
- Deputy Minister of Public Health, Mr. Santi Promphat, pinpointed the government's unwavering commitment to developing and implementing universal health coverage policies to ensure a full range of quality health services for all Thais through a national ID card system.
- As Thailand is fast approaching to become a super-aged society, the Ministry of Public Health is investing heavily in upskilling individuals across all age groups to ease the transition of the significant shift in demographics and alleviate the burden on caretakers. This initiative will be complemented by several measures – robust system enhancements catering to bedridden elderly patients and those with terminal illnesses including comprehensive care

planning for patients at home, creating a continuous care system throughout their lifespan; expanding primary healthcare coverage and developing telemedicine systems to facilitate service delivery in hard-to-reach areas; establishing health centres in every province; and setting up elderly clinics in every hospital.



- Apart from addressing universal health coverage and the rapid rise of the aged population in Thailand, the Ministry of Public Health is dedicated to developing cohesive and integrated policies that weave together aspects of economics, health, and tourism safety. This plan will include models for Blue Zones, promoting community lifestyles conducive to leading longer and healthier lives, and upgrading existing healthcare frameworks. There are also concerted efforts aimed at keeping the country's disease surveillance and control system up to date in times of emergency health situations such as a pandemic. Emergency medical services, including an air emergency medical team (Sky Doctor) for critically ill patients, are being added for tourism safety.
- As many healthcare policy directives shift to operate under a patient-centred model, leveraging digital tools and innovations to streamline procedures and improve access to specialised care is a pivotal step for enhancing the effectiveness of Thailand's public health services. From adapting to digital health systems for health data to increasing access to telemedicine, the Ministry of Public Health has been making great progress in utilising digital technology and advancements and empowering all Thais to take ownership of their health.



Keynote Address

SPEAKER



Dr. Ekachai Piensriwatchara

Deputy Director-General,
Department of Health,
Ministry of Public Health

Key takeaways:

- Echoing Mr Santi's sentiments, Dr. Ekachai highlighted Thailand as one of the world's fastest ageing societies. In 2022, approximately 20% of Thai people were 60 and above, and the country is bound to become a super-aged society in the next 10 years. What this means for the future of Thailand's public health care is the growing Silver Economy to support the rising demand for elderly care services as more people live longer and require more support in their later life. Besides enhancing long-term care services and promoting active ageing to reduce elderly-related non-communicable diseases, the Ministry of Public Health is actively adopting telemedicine and innovative solutions as hospitals' resources and manpower are overstretched.
- As Thailand looks for ways to cope with its shrinking labour force and ageing population, boosting fertility and family planning services have become part of the country's National Agenda on Fertility and Child Birth Promotion. This includes increasing reproductive health services and counselling in community hospitals. Thailand's national campaign 'GIVE Birth, Great World' for 2023 and 2024 also underscores the need for shared commitment amongst agencies and dialogue partners, and a strong collaboration between public and private sectors to address the major shift in the demographic landscape and accelerate the level of investment for Thailand's priority areas.
- Thailand's healthcare landscape is transforming to include digitalisation and remote services through telemedicine to reduce the burden on hospitals and medicine delivery. Employing digital technologies minimises the need for extensive man-hours by optimising resources and improving the accessibility and efficiency of healthcare services. For instance, telemedicine facilitates virtual consultations and enables patients to consult with healthcare providers from the comfort of their homes, lessening the strain on hospital resources and physical infrastructure. Digitalisation also reduces administrative overheads by streamlining the process of accessing and updating patient information and reduces time spent on manual paperwork and data entry. With automated systems for billing, insurance claims, and medical record-keeping in place, it allows healthcare physicians to focus on patient care rather than administrative tasks.
- The Ministry of Public Health is seeking every opportunity to improve access to healthcare, and public-private partnership is one of the mainstays to achieve that. In 2023, such partnerships have helped elevate the level of

healthcare services throughout the country – under the Eastern Economy Corridor project, the number of beds increased from 60 to 200 with the support of private partners. This facilitates the provision of healthcare services to be more affordable, convenient, and efficient while also preparing for any potential future health emergencies.

- As part of the Ministry of Public Health's endeavour to uplift health literacy for all Thais, a Health Book Application for four different age groups is currently in development – the Pink Book for mothers and children from birth to six years old; the Yellow Book for

adolescents aged six to 18 years old; the Red Book for the working population aged 19 – 59 years old; and the Blue Book for the elderly population.

- Preventive care is a key focus for the Ministry of Public Health for the years to come and the Ministry is advocating this through enhancing health literacy and promoting a Lifestyle Medicine concept (i.e., self-care) that includes maintaining a healthy diet, engaging in appropriate physical activities, getting quality sleep, managing stress, avoiding harmful substances such as alcohol, cigarettes, or other addictive substances and facilitating positive mental health.



Panel Session 1: Digitalisation of Healthcare: The Next Frontier?

SPEAKERS



Dr Nakorn Premrsri
Director,
National Vaccine Institute



Mr Decha Aupathamchat
Vice President,
White Plai Company



Dr Isorn Sookwanich
Head of Medical and Provider Network,
PLT



Pucknalin Bulakul
Managing Director,
Zuellig Pharma

Key takeaways:

- One of the National Vaccine Institute (NVI)'s missions is to drive and develop a national vaccine policy and strategic plan, and ultimately lead Thailand towards vaccine security. The NVI complements and supports the Ministry of Public Health's agenda by strengthening the capacity of the entire vaccine system in Thailand by facilitating and supporting all stages of the vaccine cycle – from laboratory testing to animal testing to manufacturing and licensing to nationwide distribution of vaccines. Leveraging technology to digitalise Thailand's supply chain, can position healthcare organisations to improve data flow and analytics; establish provider-patient connectedness; and enhance asset tracking. By doing so,

it ensures an uninterrupted supply of vaccines and national self-reliance for vaccines for all Thais which is a critical undertaking. Working with the private sector can ensure an adequate supply of doses even in the event of a shortage, good vaccine coverage, and provision of up-to-date information on the types of vaccines needed to be distributed.

- For example, Zuellig Pharma is working with all the government hospitals nationwide and public agencies such as the Government Pharmaceutical Organisation Thailand and the Thailand Food and Drug Administration to facilitate the accessibility of vaccines and ensure high immunisation coverage for all, especially in rural regions where access to healthcare services is limited. Cold chain facilities have been built to support the delivery of vaccines that require special temperature controls and Zuellig Pharma has a role in the inventory management system to support drug replenishment.
- Beyond digital supply chains, large-scale vaccination campaigns can also benefit from the adoption of digital health tools. Thailand's digital health sector is projected to reach USD 1.4 billion by 2025 and is a good signpost of the country's commitment to improving healthcare delivery and outcomes through digital

transformation. The integration of digital tools such as iClaim has revolutionised Thailand's healthcare system, achieving unprecedented advancements in a cost-effective and accessible manner. Thai citizens can now enjoy the convenience of accessing their health policy coverage seamlessly, whether seeking medical services at public or private hospitals. Such platforms can offer a faster and more streamlined process to alleviate the manual workload for data management as well.

- Telemedicine has also proven instrumental in reducing healthcare costs by 26%. Whilst this cost-saving measure may not universally apply to all diseases and there are reasonable

concerns about health data privacy and cybersecurity, its impact remains noteworthy. For example, Prudential, in collaboration with the Ministry of Public Health and other insurers, has introduced iClaim, an insurance claims system that integrates over 600 public hospitals in Thailand with insurance companies to improve the healthcare network and uplift healthcare access for all Thais. This system enables direct billing of medical expenses to insurance companies, eliminating out-of-pocket payments for customers, facilitating efficient claims approval and allowing for worry-free hospital discharges. Future enhancements, including telemedicine, will be incorporated into iClaim.



Panel Session 2: Preparing Today for Tomorrow: Addressing the Challenges of Ageing Society

SPEAKERS



Prof. Dr. Kamthorn Pruk-sananonda

Chairman of the Reproductive Medicine Sub-Committee, Royal Thai College of Obstetricians and Gynaecologists



Prof Terapong Tantawichien

Chairman of Tropical Medicine Cluster at Chulalongkorn University and the Executive Committee



Natascha Braumann

Vice President,
Global Fertility Policy, Merck



Mantana Tanprasert

General Manager,
Thailand and Myanmar, Sanofi

Key takeaways:

- Thailand's workforce is ageing fast, about 60% of them are in the informal sector with inadequate social protection for a better living. As Thailand's population decline is underway, the country's shrinking workforce and productivity pose significant challenges. To remain economically vibrant, the Thai government will have to adopt strategies to grow and sustain its workforce as it ages.
- To delay this ongoing trend, making it easy to access screening and treatment for fertility at the early stages is crucial, as timely intervention can significantly improve the chances of successful outcomes. However, fertility is not solely a healthcare concern but intricately linked to broader societal factors.



Policymakers must recognise the multi-faceted nature of fertility and address it holistically. Efforts to support fertility rates need to extend beyond traditional healthcare initiatives, integrating strategies that create conducive environments for family planning at various life stages.

- Fertility Counts, a global initiative with input from academia, private sector and public sector put together the Impact Fertility Policy and Practice Toolkit with The Economist to assess

the impact of fertility. According to the report, one of the policy areas that showed the greatest potential for impact is childcare. Whether childcare is organised within families, by the government, or within communities, it must be accessible, affordable, and reliably available so that families can make informed plans for the long run, cultivating an environment that supports and accommodates their needs.

- Healthy and active ageing is determined and shaped by several factors throughout the life cycle. Thailand is one of the countries in Asia where influenza vaccine has been listed in the Expanded Programme on Immunisation (EPI). The experience of grappling with COVID-19 has significantly heightened vaccine knowledge among the population, leading to an increased vaccination rate post-pandemic. Despite this, only 34% of the adult population in Thailand are vaccinated against influenza which falls significantly short of the 75% immunisation target rate set by the World Health Organisation. One significant barrier is the scepticism among doctors harbouring doubts about vaccine efficacy and safety, leading to a lack of confidence among patients. Tackling vaccine hesitancy in Thailand requires an approach rooted in transparent and enhanced communication. Providing clear information about the safety and efficacy of vaccines, and highlighting their benefits across different age groups, is essential.
- Earlier this year, a joint initiative between the National Health Security Office and the Ministry of Public Health offered free flu shots to all Thai citizens, regardless of their health insurance coverage. As older adults are at a greater risk of getting vaccine preventable diseases (VPD), there is an urgent need to understand the benefits of adult immunisation, identify missed opportunities and promote uptake of immunisation among older adults to build strengthened and sustainable health systems. Immunisation throughout the life-course enables adults to age with reduced risk of diseases, thereby enabling healthier, more active and more productive ageing. Humanising the vaccination experience by sharing personal stories and utilising testimonials from individuals can help create a relatable narrative that resonates with the public. In parallel, cross-sector initiatives aimed at disseminating accurate vaccine information and countering misinformation can boost public confidence in vaccines and cultivate a more informed and receptive approach to vaccination among the Thai population. Simultaneously, improved accessibility and judicious allocation of health resources are critical to ensure vaccines reach those who need them the most, bridging gaps in healthcare delivery.

Panel Session 3: Building a Sustainable Healthcare System and Enhancing Accessibility in Thailand

SPEAKERS



Dr Nantana Kaisaeng
Senior Pharmacist,
Medicines Regulation Division,
Thailand FDA



Dr. Rungpetch C. Sakulbumrungsil
Ph.D., Assistant Professor in Social and
Administrative Pharmacy Department,
Faculty of Pharmaceutical Sciences,
Chulalongkorn University



Paranee Adulyapichet
Head of Public Affairs,
Science and Sustainability ASEAN, Bayer

Key takeaways:

- The dual focus on Thailand's health policy on improving universal health coverage and healthcare access to all indicates an increased interest to uplift healthcare service delivery capacity at the primary care level. The establishment of the new National Health Board was a significant move by the new Thai government and demonstrates its commitment to ensuring that no one is left behind when Thailand transforms its healthcare system.
- The current healthcare financing model has also been faced with significant challenges, prompting a need to pivot towards prioritising accessibility and embracing a patient-centric approach. By centring people's access to healthcare as the desired outcome, it unveils potential solutions, including the exploration of alternative healthcare financing models which refers to the private sector sharing financial risks in patient treatment costs with the government. Such mechanisms support patient access and treatment needs, ensure the predictability of the government's budget, and contribute to achieving superior health outcomes. Thus, adapting policies and regulations that cultivate and enable access to self-care at all levels of the patient journey can the burden on the healthcare system.



- Bayer has demonstrated a robust commitment to sustainable healthcare by actively engaging in initiatives aimed at enhancing access to medicines, promoting family planning, and improving capacity building. In collaboration with the Department of Health under the Ministry of Public Health and the Planned Parenthood Association of Thailand, Bayer has undertaken efforts to raise awareness of family planning at the grassroots level. This includes sharing knowledge on reproductive health and equipping the Thai people with knowledge and skills to manage their health and individual well-being.
- By integrating incentives into health policies, there is a powerful

potential to motivate individuals within communities to make choices that contribute to their well-being. Addressing health literacy from a young age is especially focal, as habits formed early in life tend to persist into adulthood. This not only promotes preventive health measures but also establishes a foundation for a healthier community overall. Importantly, increasing health literacy levels entails the need to foster public-private partnerships. Leveraging resources, expertise and innovative strategies from both sectors creates a comprehensive approach and enhances the reach and effectiveness of targeted initiatives, making information more accessible to inform health-related decision-making.



Closing Remarks

SPEAKER



Chris Humphrey
Executive Director,
EU-ASEAN Business Council

Key takeaways:

- It is evident that Thailand has made commendable strides in fortifying its healthcare system – from expanding healthcare units to implementing targeted campaigns addressing communicable and non-communicable diseases. However, there is a need to also recognise the persistent challenges that remain, particularly in strengthening supply chains, raising fertility rates, enhancing life-course immunisation, transitioning to an aged society, and ensuring that healthcare remains affordable and accessible for all Thais.
- The demographic shift in Thailand from an ageing society to an aged society brings to the forefront the imperative need for adaptive healthcare strategies. One aspect is the transformative potential of digitalisation of healthcare. The experiences of the global response to the COVID-19 pandemic have underscored the importance of harnessing digital technologies. The focus has shifted from debating the necessity of investment in digitalising and transforming the healthcare system to exploring how Thailand's digital transformation can effectively address the emerging public health needs and threats in the country.
- Public-private partnerships can certainly provide more accessible, affordable and quality healthcare systems for the Thai population.
- Shifting from managing the increasing burden of disease costs towards preventative health not only relieves pressure on hospitals but also promotes patient-centric care within communities.
- It is clear that Thailand is not only acknowledging its healthcare challenges but is also actively seeking innovative solutions to achieve its vision of healthier people, happier healthcare workers, and a sustainable health system.



