

STRATEGY 2030 **HEALTH SECTOR** **DIRECTIONAL GUIDE** SUMMARY

Promoting Universal Health Coverage in Asia and the Pacific



The ***Health Sector Directional Guide*** provides strategic direction for Asian Development Bank (ADB) assistance to the health sector through 2030. It describes the context and the rationale that will guide ADB's agenda for supporting its developing member countries with financing, knowledge, convening ability, and technical assistance, to make ADB's health sector investments more coherent, relevant, efficient, and effective.

The directional guide aligns with ADB's Strategy 2030 and its seven operational priorities **to accelerate progress toward universal health coverage in Asia and the Pacific**, with targeted investments in gender equality, climate resilience, and pandemic preparedness and response.

Where We Are

Health is vital for human capital. Investments in human capital drive productivity, economic growth, and competitiveness. Universal health coverage (UHC) plays a crucial role in achieving and sustaining such outcomes. Most countries in Asia and the Pacific have widely embraced UHC, although progress in the region remains uneven. Significant gains have been made in population health outcomes. Life expectancy at birth has increased steadily across the region over the past 2 decades, while infant mortality has declined dramatically—particularly in lower-middle and low-income countries.

However, health systems in the region face an ongoing “triple burden” of disease: noncommunicable diseases are on the rise; there is a continuing need for progress in maternal and child health; and communicable diseases like tuberculosis, HIV/AIDS, malaria, and other pathogens (e.g., coronavirus disease [COVID-19]) remain persistent threats. Indeed, the COVID-19 pandemic has brought renewed attention to the importance of advancing health systems toward UHC. It has also created an impetus for higher investment in public health capacity in Asia and the Pacific.

What We Will Do

The *Health Sector Directional Guide* details ADB’s vision for providing finance, technical assistance, and knowledge solutions to promote UHC and eradicate extreme poverty. Following the bank’s Strategy 2030 to secure a prosperous, inclusive, and resilient future for Asia and the Pacific, the guide aims to facilitate Sustainable Development Goals.

Where We Want to Be

Charting ADB’s strategies for health, the *Health Sector Directional Guide* explains the bank’s agenda in supporting developing member countries (DMCs). It also seeks to achieve more coherent, relevant, efficient, and effective ADB investments in the health sector, in line with Strategy 2030 and its seven operational priorities. Progress toward UHC is essential to eradicate extreme poverty and achieve a prosperous, inclusive, resilient, and sustainable future for Asia and the Pacific.

The guide addresses five major trends that present challenges and opportunities for improving health in the region over the next decade. These trends involve rapid urbanization and greater exposure to environmental pollutants and pathogens, demographic shifts,

decentralization and stronger regional cooperation, digitalization, and pandemic threats. The directional guide also considers the evolving impact of climate change, in both adaptation and mitigation directions, and the unfinished agenda for gender equality in health.

By 2030, ADB aims to secure a higher share for health in its total commitments, designing more effective projects and promoting multisector activities in key areas. In 2021, sovereign loans and grants for health were valued around \$6.8 billion—of which 79%, or about \$5 billion, was related to vaccine financing. The COVID-19 momentum for health as a share of total commitments is expected to decline, but the health sector needs of DMCs will remain high. By aiming to increase its target range for health finance from 3%–5% to 6%–10%, ADB will boost its discovery and design of health-related projects. Aligned with this expansion, the guide affirms a recommitment to enabling more effective health projects—with multisector activities in key areas, improved knowledge services and partnerships, and greater private sector participation.

Five Focal Areas for Restoring Progress toward Universal Health Coverage

The directional guide examines five interlinked areas for improving outcomes and restoring progress toward UHC in Asia and the Pacific, and describes ADB’s comparative advantage in each area.





Improving governance, policy, and public goods.

Better health governance emphasizes the public sector's role in setting the rules for health and non-health actors, especially in regulating and legislating for the region's public and private health systems. As health systems progressively become more complex and private health delivery expands in scale, regulation will be needed to protect patients' rights and level the playing field. Deploying its expertise in advisory and policy support for health sector governance, ADB will also apply its substantial experience to improve financial and human resource management in the health sector, while augmenting social health insurance systems to make health care more accessible. ADB will also assist governments in laying the groundwork for successful digital health transformation, through such means as the *Digital Health Implementation Guide for the Pacific* and support for the Digital Health Mission in India. Likewise, as the locus of health governance shifts toward the subnational levels, investments will be increasingly required at those levels. ADB will also strengthen its ability to boost health sector reforms through policy-based lending, particularly policy reforms that contribute to growth and poverty reduction.



Enhancing health financing and incentives.

Both public- and private-led financing are critical to advancing primary health care and UHC across Asia and the Pacific. Government tax-based financing will continue to be important in ensuring that health care is accessible and affordable to poor and vulnerable, and in addressing market failure in health care. ADB financing will also encourage private investment in health care in the region, through incentive programs and other measures. Public-private partnerships, and innovative financing models such as the ADB Health Bonds (which have funded projects across countries), will enable the bank to stimulate private investment in primary and geriatric care, basic research and development, and integrated health-care networks—widening coverage to neglected and underserved rural areas over the next decade.



Expanding health infrastructure and systems.

Infrastructure comprises the traditional elements of health facilities and equipment—such as hospitals, clinics, and laboratories—along with the information and communication technology systems that link patients to providers, increase remote care and diagnostics, reduce crowding at public sites, and ultimately allow more effective use of existing physical infrastructure. Crucially, health infrastructure and systems also involve logistics and supply chains. ADB's pre-pandemic projects related to physical infrastructure will continue, in both the sovereign and nonsovereign domains. Applying its comparative advantage in nonsovereign debt and equity financing for hospital network expansions, the bank will also increase its capacity in sovereign financing to augment primary health infrastructure. Through its project experience and

technical assistance, ADB will stimulate private sector operations and boost green, climate-resilient facilities, integrating designs and constructions to create the livable cities envisaged in Strategy 2030. Building on lessons from COVID-19, ADB will continue to support sustainable vaccine manufacturing, and loans for pharmaceutical sector regulation.



Strengthening the health workforce.

Investments in the number and quality of health-care professionals will drive changes in workforce production, absorption, and composition. Even before COVID-19, the region was already facing significant shortages of health workers needed for progress toward UHC and the Sustainable Development Goal of good health and well-being. As epidemiological transitions intensify, and the volume and type of health-care demands shift, the region's health workforce will also have to change. ADB will support the need for more specialists, while also providing resources for institutions training general practitioners, nurses, and paraprofessionals. The escalating automation of certain health-care management processes, and opportunities for telemedicine with the digital handling of health-care events (e.g., remote diagnostics), will affect both the skills and numbers of staff needed. Therefore, investments will consider the market for health workers, their opportunities to upskill, health workforce mobility across borders, and post-training work prospects.



Enhancing pandemic preparedness and response.

Major epidemics are not new in Asia and the Pacific, but COVID-19 has had a severe impact on DMCs in the region, by virtue of its breadth, duration, and uncertainties. Given the possibility of future threats, investments in long-term regional health security, including pandemic preparedness and response (PPR), strong primary health care, and community engagement, are critical. Besides, lessons learned from the COVID-19 pandemic clearly demonstrate the inadequacy of most containment and mitigation measures in preventing the spread of the virus, and the disproportionate effect of many of these measures on poor people. As well as funding PPR, increased investments fostering the prevention of pandemics are also crucial. ADB will support national, regional, and emerging global efforts to reinvest in PPR as a public good, such as (i) revitalized institutions for disease control and prevention; (ii) systems for disease surveillance, diagnostics, and testing; (iii) pharmaceutical and nonpharmaceutical countermeasures; and (iv) clinical and therapeutic capacity building. Such support includes close involvement in shaping the region's health cooperation systems, for more coordinated and better-financed PPR, and in addressing the impact of COVID-19.

Crosscutting Issues in Health Sector Support

The directional guide also identifies two crosscutting issues to be addressed in health sector support. ADB will strengthen the integration and coordination of these focal areas within the broader framework of UHC and across health sector actions.



Promoting gender equality. Following Operational Priority 2 in its Strategy 2030, ADB's projects and initiatives in these five focal areas must include closer attention to gender equality. This will involve interventions in health sector reform agendas, to support new policies that amplify women's roles as health-care providers, as well as building capacities to meet women's evolving health needs. ADB will also tackle men's health and safety issues, such as road accidents, disability, and alcohol and drug abuse—especially as these impact women's welfare as primary carers.

On the cover: Clockwise: (1) The Pandemic Sub-National Reference Laboratory at the Jose B. Lingad Memorial Regional Hospital in San Fernando City, Pampanga on 9 May 2020. The laboratory financed by the \$3 million grant from the Asia Pacific Disaster Response Fund can perform up to 3,000 COVID-19 tests daily, significantly increasing the country's testing capacity. (2) Hospital staff performing endoscopy on a patient at the Endoscopy Centre of the Prince of Wales Hospital in Sha Tin, New Territories in Hong Kong. Construction of the hospital started in 1979 on reclaimed land. The hospital commenced operations in 1984. (3) Children and parents attending the monthly Mother and Child Health Check program conducted in one of the resettlement villages near the Nakai Reservoir. Surveys conducted before the project showed that the general health of the people in the area was very poor. High rates of malnutrition, infant and maternal mortality and parasitic infestation were also common. The public health programme helped improve the health of the affected people and it also enabled health workers to improve their delivery of services across the province. The Nam Theun 2 is a 1070 MW hydropower plant on Nam Theun river in Laos PDR. 95% of the power produced by the plant is exported to Thailand and the rest are consumed locally. Revenues from the power plant are used by the government of Lao PDR to help reduce poverty in the country. The Power Plant started its commercial operations in 2010. (4) A doctor uses a syringe to administer a vaccine to a child at the Makabayan Barangka Drive Health Center during a vaccination drive in Mandaluyong City, Philippines, on December 16, 2020. (5) The blood center in Tashkent City was equipped through the ADV-funded Woman and Child Health Development Project. (6) The construction site of the Songinohairkhan district hospital is a model multifunctional general hospital that other district hospitals follow...The Fourth and Fifth Health Sector Development Project will upgrade hospital services in Ulaanbaatar, improve human resource development, and strengthen the country's drug safety regime. (7) Midwives are making a house call to a pregnant woman to check her health and do malaria testing. (8) Rohila Boboeva, head of the delivery ward at the Rasht Central Hospital, examines a newborn baby. The Maternal and Child Health Integrated Care Project will provide women and children with quality maternal and child health (MCH) services in Rasht, Tajikistan.

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Responding to the challenge of climate change.

Continuing to integrate climate risks and opportunities in project planning, ADB will assist DMCs to prepare health systems with adaptation and mitigation measures that anticipate the effects of climate change. In mitigation, there is already an emphasis on green health infrastructure. To promote adaptation, increasing the climate resilience of health facilities is becoming more common in ADB health projects that fund public infrastructure. Overall, for climate-related adaptation, the health sector's agenda is aligned with ADB guidance on developing projects that support adaptation and climate resilience. ADB's health sector knowledge and its organization of meetings will boost climate-related regional cooperation and initiatives. The bank will publish guidance on climate change and health—to help teams design, implement, and augment climate-sensitive health operations, while consolidating their integration within the UHC framework.

Following Strategy 2030, the *Health Sector Directional Guide* will be implemented until 2030. Designed to evolve as a living document, the publication will be updated to remain relevant in the dynamic context of Asia and the Pacific.

Read the *Health Sector Directional Guide* in full here:



<https://www.adb.org/documents/strategy-2030-health-sector-directional-guide>

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