BioSpectrum
the business of Bio & Health Sciences
ASIA EDITION

The First Southeast Asia Access to Medicines Summit Paves the Path for Sustainable and Equitable Access for Patients

February 28, 2025 | News | By Hithaishi C Bhaskar

Regional organizations pledge to work together to overcome access barriers to essential medicines in Southeast Asia, with an actionable framework



The inaugural Southeast Asia Access to Medicine Summit (SEA AtM Summit) has convened over 100 regional leaders, policymakers, academic institutions, healthcare professionals, industry players, and patient advocates to address a critical and persistent challenge: ensuring sustainable and equitable access to innovative medicines for the region's underserved communities.

Access to medicines remains a critical challenge in Southeast Asia (SEA), underscoring an urgent need for collaboration across the healthcare ecosystem. According to the World Health Organization (WHO), progress toward universal health coverage (UHC) has stalled since 20191, leaving millions without adequate medical support. Many continue to grapple with fragile health care infrastructure, facing significant gaps in screening, diagnostics, and treatment availability. Addressing these challenges requires a unified effort fromgovernments, health organizations, and industry leaders to drive sustainable solutions and ensure equitable access to health care for all.

The first in the region, the **Access Health International**, **AVPN**, and **SingHealth Duke-NUS Global Health Institute joined hands with Takeda to host the SEA AtM** summit, aimed to foster collective efforts to overcome access barriers in the region, and commit to co-create actionable solutions that drive systemic and impactful change.

Dr. Krishna Reddy, CEO of Access Health International, shared his perspective on creating sustainable health systems through cross-industry collaborations highlighting that, "Southeast Asia's healthcare challenges demand innovative, integrated, and collaborative solutions. Forums like this Summit provide a critical platform for cross-industry dialogue, fostering partnerships that can drive meaningful and lasting change. By bringing together diverse stakeholders, we can collectively address barriers to access, share best practices, and advance sustainable healthcare solutions that ensure equitable and resilient health systems across the region."

A Shared Commitment for Access to Medicines

Dion Warren, Area Head of India & SEA, Takeda mentioned that "Access to medicines is more than just bringing medicines to patients. To achieve sustainable and equitable access, we need to strengthen healthcare systems. Since systematic change takes time and Southeast Asia is a diverse region with unique barriers to patient access, no single entity can successfully drive change alone. Building trusted, effective and sustainable collaborations across government organizations,

private sector, NGOs, academic institutions and patient organizations, is the crucial way forward. Only together, we can achieve lasting positive transformation in the healthcare landscape across Southeast Asia.

The Southeast Asia Access to Medicines Pledge

A key highlight of the summit was the **Southeast Asia Access to Medicines Pledge**, a commitment by all partners to drive long-term, sustainable change in the region with an opportunity for more stakeholders across the industry to join in. This pledge establishes a shared vision and collective responsibility to:

Champion inclusive healthcare systems – Engage and mobilize stakeholders across the healthcare ecosystem, including governments, industry, civil society, and communities, to prioritize equitable access to medicines.

Collaborate for innovation – Forge and strengthen partnerships that enable scalable solutionsaddressing diseases and conditions disproportionately affecting populations in SEA.

Enable policy transformation – Advocate for evidence-based policies that remove systemic barriers to medicine access and strengthen healthcare systems in the region.

Elevate community voices – Ensure that the perspectives of the most affected communities are integrated into decision-making processes, working in collaboration with key partners.

Demonstrate progress – Support the creation of a concrete, measurable roadmap with achievable milestones that will track and assess improvements in access to medicines across SEA.

Key Highlights of the Summit

Discussions throughout the summit **centered on actionable strategies to tackle barriers to medicine access, including affordability, infrastructure limitations, and regulatory complexities**. Participants explored how public-private partnerships, health technology assessment schemes, and digital health tools could play a role in overcoming these challenges and improving accessibility for underserved populations.

Madhavika Bajoria, Executive Director (Health and Nutrition Platform) at the AVPN, emphasized the importance of multi-sector collaboration in advancing healthcare access, stating that "the Southeast Asia Access to Medicines Pledge is a critical step in aligning cross-sector efforts toward meaningful, lasting change. By bringing together policymakers, funders, and healthcare professionals, we can drive impactful solutions that ensure medicines reach those who need them most. This Summit reinforces our shared commitment to forging partnerships that will help close the healthcare access gap across the region."

A **critical focus of the summit was mapping existing gaps across Southeast Asia's healthcare landscape**

Experts examined how fragmented healthcare systems, limited funding mechanisms, and economic disparities continue to hinder medicine access. Additionally, discussions emphasized the need for sustainable funding ecosystems to support innovative treatments and ensure long-term affordability and availability. Knowledge sharing was a cornerstone of the summit, with expert-led sessions showcasing best practices and successful models of cross-sector collaboration in healthcare delivery and infrastructure development.

Associate Professor Jonas Karlström, SingHealth Duke-NUS Global Health Institute, emphasized the urgent need for evidence-based solutions in the face of evolving global challenges stating that " Access to medicines is not just a healthcare issue—it is shaped by geopolitical shifts, climate change, and economic disparities that impact public health systems across Southeast Asia. As these challenges intensify, action must be guided by data, evidence, and scalable policy solutions.

At the SingHealth Duke-NUS Global Health Institute, we are committed to advancing health equity through targeted, high-impact interventions. We act only where there is a clear and demonstrated need and where we are uniquely positioned to make a difference. By bridging scientific expertise with real-world solutions, as we pledge today, we strengthen healthcare systems to be more resilient and adaptable to emerging crises. Only then can we drive sustainable improvements and champion solutions that create lasting impact, especially for the most vulnerable communities, including children and their families."

Looking ahead, the Southeast Asia Access to Medicines Pledge will serve as a catalyst for action, driving a shared roadmap to address critical healthcare challenges in the region. The commitments made at this Summit mark the beginning of a sustained, multi-stakeholder effort to break down barriers to medicine access through innovation, collaboration, and systemic

change.

Onsite Coverage by Hithaishi Bhaskar