

Economist Impact presents the 5th edition of "Future of Health Asia" in Singapore forging the healthcare landscape in Asia

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Singapore hosted health, science, and policy leaders to discuss critical challenges in the Asia-Pacific healthcare sector amid rising technological disruption, chronic disease burdens, and international trade tensions



The **5th edition of Future of Health Asia** convened in Singapore on October 16, bringing together senior leaders from healthcare, government, and patient advocacy. The event focused on addressing the challenges posed by rising technological disruptions, the increasing burden of chronic diseases, and global economic uncertainty.

Over 500 diverse voices came together in Singapore for the 5th edition of "Future of Health Asia", featuring 50+ speakers and 15+ sessions that aimed to drive innovation and create healthier futures across Asia and the Pacific.

The Asia-Pacific's healthcare sector faces mounting pressures. Rapidly ageing populations are driving higher demand for care, while the growing prevalence of chronic diseases such as diabetes, obesity and cancer adds long-term strain. At the same time, technological innovations from AI-enabled diagnostics to connected hospitals are reshaping delivery models, yet adoption is uneven across countries and socioeconomic groups. International trade tensions further complicate access to medicines, supply chains and innovation pathways.

The forum spotlighted sessions on smart diagnoses and better treatments through AI-enabled care, addressing the challenges of chronic diseases with integrated care approaches, linking medtech innovation with capital, promoting longer and healthier lives, and centering patient voices to understand multidimensional access to healthcare.

Expts examined the healthcare sector's most pressing issues amid ageing populations, technological disruption and international trade tensions covering majorly the following themes:

- * Meeting patients' demand for simple healthcare
- * Sustainable and accessible health systems
- * Hospitals of the next generation

- * Rethinking healthcare financing in an era of trade wars
- * Obesity management
- * Climate action in healthcare
- * The AI-enabled care shift and governing AI in health
- * The next era of precision medicine

Charles Ross, Head of Policy and Insights for Asia-Pacific at Economist Impact, shared insights through a Future Outlook presentation based on Economist Impact research and Economist Intelligence Unit (EIU) analysis. Furthermore, Charles led discussions with health and technology leaders **Chien-Chang Lee** from Taiwan and **Colin Lim** from Singapore, conducted a spotlight interview with **Arjan Toor** from Prudential on meeting patient demands for simpler healthcare, and moderated a thought-provoking debate on whether aging should be classified as a disease, featuring **Andrea B. Maier** and **Wai Chong Ng**.

Some of the key highlights were;

Chien-Chang Lee, Chief Information Officer at Taiwan's Ministry of Health and Welfare, and Colin Lim, Chief Information Officer and Chief Data Officer at Singapore's Ministry of Health, discussed how **digital transformation is reshaping public health systems** in the region. The session explored how authorities are leveraging data, technology, and digital innovation to strengthen healthcare models, improve patient outcomes, and address governance challenges. They shared insights on the actions and priorities shaping the intersection of technology and public health in Singapore and Taiwan.

Arjan Toor, Chief Executive of Health at Prudential plc, discussed the **challenges patients face in balancing healthcare** with work and family pressures, often delaying care due to complexity and confusion. Citing a survey by Economist Impact, he highlighted the growing demand for healthcare that fits seamlessly into patients' lives with minimal disruption. The session examined barriers to easy access, key pain points in patient journeys, and how insurers and providers can reduce disruption and integrate easy navigation into healthcare models. Toor called for concrete actions from stakeholders to deliver truly patient-centred healthcare and meet the demands of modern consumers.

The panel on "**Smarter diagnoses, better treatments: the AI-enabled care shift**" explored how AI is revolutionizing diagnostics and therapies, from early cancer detection to personalized treatment plans. Healthcare systems are racing to adopt AI, but the gap between its potential and practical application remains wide. The session delved into where AI is truly revolutionising patient care, where it is falling short, and the risks and regulatory hurdles that still need to be addressed. Key questions included how to prevent AI from replicating biases in clinical decision-making, particularly for underserved populations, and whether the latest wave of AI tools will enhance clinicians or potentially make them obsolete. The panel featured insights from Bronwyn Le Grice, Chief Executive and Managing Director of ANDHealth, Australia; Peter Forbes, Group Chief Digital Officer at the National University Health System, Singapore; Shuba Srinivasan, Chief Executive of Prince Court Medical Centre, Malaysia; and Vivek Rajagopal, Group Chief Analytics and AI Officer at Narayana Health, India.

Obesity is a critical driver of the global non-communicable disease (NCD) epidemic, contributing not only to its own prevalence but also to the rising rates of diabetes, heart disease, cancer, and other chronic illnesses. In the Asia-Pacific region, where healthcare systems are already under significant strain, the interplay between obesity and NCDs poses a substantial challenge to individuals and societies. Addressing this issue requires prioritizing policy changes that promote an integrated care approach, ensuring equitable access to high-quality healthcare for all. Lilly Taiwan Vice-President and General Manager Lauren Lazowski facilitated a discussion on the link between **obesity and other non-communicable diseases (NCDs)**, highlighting their impact on societies and communities, especially in Asia. She highlighted how overburdened healthcare systems face mounting challenges due to obesity's increasing prevalence and its associated health consequences. She emphasized the role of policymakers in prioritizing strategies to promote an integrated care approach, ensuring equitable access to high-quality care.

A panel of experts, consisting of Ewan Davis, Festus Susilo, and Paolo Borromeo, discussed how innovation and capital are interconnected within the field of medical technology. Landscape. An overview of the **challenges and opportunities in medtech innovation** was provided in this session, which examined the transformative role of medical technology in reshaping healthcare, from AI-driven diagnostics to robotic surgery. The session delved into the interplay between strategic investments, regulatory hurdles, and evolving global priorities, offering insights into where smart capital is directed. Founders gained perspective on scaling startups, while the discussion also examined whether innovation is outpacing investor patience and how regulatory frameworks are shaping the competitive landscape.

Hospitals of the next generation must go beyond clinical excellence to embrace system-wide intelligence. **Advanced diagnostics, predictive analytics, automated operations, and connected infrastructure** are keys to creating smart hospitals that promise better patient outcomes and more efficient, profitable models. However, the true measure of success

lies in whether these systems deliver healthier results. This requires careful integration of technology, clinical workflows, and patient-focused design. A panel session featuring David T Boucher, Former Chief Executive Officer, Bumrungrad International Hospital Phuket; Eric Wong, Group Chief Digital Health Officer, National Healthcare Group; Kenneth Tsang, Regional Chief Executive Officer, IHH Healthcare North Asia; Melvin Heng, Executive Director and Group Chief Executive Officer, Thomson Medical Group, raised critical questions regarding whether healthcare leaders are building truly intelligent hospitals or simply more expensive ones. The session also explored the role of current and future healthcare workers in this transformation and the challenges faced by low- and low-middle-income countries in leveraging such advancements.

Setiaji, Senior Advisor of Health Technology to the Minister of Health of Indonesia, discussed how **AI could transform healthcare systems in Indonesia**. Indonesia has embraced AI's potential with a people-first approach, prioritizing data sovereignty and strong protection. The Ministry of Health in Indonesia developed an AI helpdesk and medical imaging analysis for early detection of TB, lung cancer, and stroke. With 12 million citizens already benefiting from free health screenings, the country used AI to analyze these results. This study showed how Indonesia is aiming to improve population health using AI-enabled solutions.

A unique session exploring how Economist Impact's **"Health Dividend Initiative"** has reframed health value as an investment in growth and prosperity. Amanda Stucke, principal of health policy and insights at Economist Impact, joined Jason Yin, senior analyst for the initiative, as they shared insights on the concept's development, the evidence supporting it, and its implications for policymakers and business leaders across Asia. They discussed the opportunities for unlocking the health dividend and how stakeholders could translate this vision into action.

The nature of access to healthcare goes beyond proximity or cost, and patients' voices should be considered in the process of understanding access to healthcare. The design of the system, the social context, and the lived experience played a crucial role. As a first step toward designing more connected care, an exclusive panel of regional experts from across Asia convened to explore the realities of healthcare access and address the challenges patients encounter. The discussion focused on the **barriers patients face in accessing the right care at the right time, place, and price**, as well as how patient experiences influenced their trust in healthcare systems. Additionally, the panel examined how insurers and payers could better support health access across diverse income and age groups. Participants included: - Choo Kok Ming, Chief Executive, National Kidney Foundation, Malaysia - Chris Forbes, Chief Executive, Kidney Health Australia - Eric Mansion, Pharma General Manager, Sanofi South-East Asia and India - Ratna Devi, Board Chair, India Alliance of Patient Groups, and Chief Executive, Dakshayani and Amaravati Health and Education.

Healthcare systems were among the casualties of escalating global tariff wars, which increased costs, disrupted supply chains, and exposed the fragility of national financing models. An additional session examined the **impact of health care reform on the supply chain of medical supplies, pharmaceutical pricing, investment in innovation, and public health budgets**. It also explored whether global health priorities were compromised in trade negotiations and who bore the cost when economic warfare intersected with public health. Key panelists were Ratna Devi Board chair, India Alliance of Patient Groups, and chief executive, Dakshayani and Amaravati Health and Education Aniruddha Patil Unit head, health and education investments, Asian Development Bank Giles Newmarch Senior investment officer, health and education, International Finance Corporation Muhammed Anis bin Abd Wahab Head of health financing department, ProtectHealth Corporation, Ministry of Health, Malaysia Wei Yang Cheong Vice provost (strategic research partnerships), Singapore Management University and senior adviser (health economics), Ministry of Health, Singapore.

As AI reshapes diagnostics, therapies, and decision-making in healthcare, regulators face the challenge of fostering innovation while safeguarding patient safety, data integrity, and ethical standards. Considering this, a session examined **emerging regulatory frameworks, uncertainties, and global tensions surrounding AI governance in medicine**. Key issues such as accountability bias, and the pace of regulatory adaptation, and whether healthcare systems are prepared to trust AI with life-or-death decisions were the highlights. The session also addressed the legal and ethical risks of AI-enabled tools for misdiagnosing, the responsibility for such errors, and the adaptation of global best practices for Asian economies. Participants included, Ann Single, Chief Executive, Patient Voice Initiative - Asnawi Abdullah, Director-General of Health Policy, Ministry of Health, Indonesia - Zhuang Guangyi, Deputy Director, Health Sciences Authority, Singapore.

Onsite Coverage by Hithaishi Bhaskar