



# HOW PHARMACEUTICAL SYSTEMS ARE ORGANIZED IN ASIA AND THE PACIFIC



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## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

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There are important differences in the markets for medicines in countries in Asia and the Pacific in this study. These are mainly due to the political, financial and regulatory environments as well as characteristics of the pharmaceutical manufacturing industry. However, all countries face the test of transition brought about by demographic changes, shifting epidemiological trends and increasing inequities, among others. As with other regions of the world, a characteristic of lower- and upper-middle-income countries is that pharmaceuticals account for a high proportion of health expenditures. Medicines account for a larger share of the health budgets in resource-constrained countries.

Pharmaceutical systems are complex and involve several intermediaries between medicines manufacturers and consumers. This suggests the need for better coordination among various agencies and relevant stakeholders involved. The intricate pharmaceutical landscape demands a better understanding of how pharmaceutical markets are organized, regulated and financed to foster policies aimed at achieving universal and equitable access to essential medicines.

Achieving equitable access to affordable, safe, efficacious and quality medicines through sound pharmaceutical policies, programmes and other interventions has remained a continuing challenge at all levels of health system strengthening for countries, with some performing better than others. This reality is even more pronounced in countries that are currently working towards universal health coverage where a large part of pharmaceutical spending is still out of pocket.

# INTRODUCTION

**Medicines, together with other health technologies, are one of the building blocks of a health system. Without them, it is impossible to achieve desirable health outcomes for individual patients and communities.**

As countries make further progress towards universal health coverage, essential medicines, more than ever, are crucial to achieving health and inclusive socioeconomic development. Sustainable Development Goal target 3.8 mentions the importance of “access to safe, effective, quality and affordable essential medicines and vaccines for all” as a central component of universal health coverage.

Access to essential medicines encompasses quality, safety and efficacy of drugs, as well as their availability, affordability and appropriate use. However, improving access to quality-assured essential medicines is not an end in itself. It is a means to improving health status, promoting well-being and achieving equity across populations. Demographic, epidemiological and economic transitions continue to generate major challenges for essential medicines.

Addressing issues around access to medicines requires a comprehensive understanding of how pharmaceutical systems are organized and function. This report presents profiles of 14 countries in Asia and the Pacific – Australia, Brunei Darussalam, Cambodia, China, Indonesia, Republic of Korea, Lao People’s Democratic Republic, Malaysia, Mongolia, New Zealand, Philippines, Singapore, Thailand and Viet Nam – that outline resources, structures and processes relating to ensuring availability and accessibility of pharmaceuticals in specific country settings and their interactions with the health-care

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