

WHO South- East Asia Region commits to affordable healthcare

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Medical products are a major component of out-of-pocket health care spending which has pushed 65 million people into poverty in the WHO South-East Asia Region.



Member countries of WHO South-East Asia Region have committed to make essential medicines, vaccines, diagnostics and medical devices affordable and accessible to all, both within the Region and beyond.

“Access to safe, effective and affordable medical products vital to prevent sufferings and impoverishment resulting from high out-of-pocket expenses on healthcare by families, especially the poor,” Dr Poonam Khetrpal Singh, Regional Director, WHO South-East Asia Region, said, as health ministers and officials of the 11 Member countries signed the ‘Delhi Declaration’ to improve access to essential medical products.

Medical products are a major component of out-of-pocket health care spending which has pushed 65 million people into poverty in the WHO South-East Asia Region.

Though significant efforts have been made by countries in recent years, as improving access to essential medicines is a WHO flagship priority programme in the Region since 2014, challenges remain in providing the right medical products at the right time to those in need.

To overcome challenges, the Delhi Declaration calls for allocation of sufficient financial resources by countries, as part of overall health financing strategies, to reduce out-of-pocket payments of families on essential medicines.

The declaration calls for strengthening national policies, regulation, supply chain management, and capacity to leverage intellectual property and trade for public health, to improve access to medicines and vaccines.

Signing the declaration at the Seventy-first Regional Committee Session of WHO South-East Asia Region, Member countries committed to developing an effective, transparent and participatory mechanism for regional price negotiation and pooled procurement to ensure accessibility and affordability of essential medical products for life threatening and rare diseases.

The Member countries committed to strengthen regulatory cooperation and collaboration to improve availability, quality and safety of essential medical products through the South-East Asia Regulatory Network (SEARN).

With the Region emerging as a major manufacturer of essential medical products especially generic medicines, Member countries agreed to leverage this strength to improve accessibility and affordability both within the Region and beyond.

The Member countries committed to developing an essential medical products list, in particular essential diagnostics list, for improved patient care, affordability of quality tests, and greater capacity to diagnose diseases during outbreaks and strengthened capabilities of national laboratories.

The declaration also emphasized on more appropriate use of antibiotics; and innovation and investment in R&D including for neglected diseases, and affordable medical products.

The Member countries agreed to ensure universal accessibility and affordability of essential medical products by 2030, as part of achieving universal health coverage (UHC) and the health related goals of SDG 2030 agenda.

The Regional Committee is held annually and is hosted by one of the 11 Member countries or the WHO South-East Asia Regional Office.