

Introduction

The world is emerging from the COVID-19 pandemic with a renewed focus on health. The Asia-Pacific region, bearing the initial brunt of the pandemic, remains vulnerable to ongoing challenges but offers valuable lessons for the global community.

As the Asia-Pacific Research Hub of the Partnership for Health System Sustainability and Resilience (PHSSR), CAPRI has coordinated reports on the **sustainability and resilience of health systems in the region**. In 2023, under CAPRI's guidance, in-country experts conducted extensive research into the health systems of Malaysia, three of the Pacific Islands Countries and Territories (PICTs; specifically, Republic of Marshall Islands, Tonga, and Vanuatu), South Korea, and Taiwan, generating country reports with policy recommendations. This summary outlines the common health systems trends in the Asia-Pacific to inform collaborative efforts in addressing regional and global challenges.

Objectives

- Explore key **health systems trends** in the Asia-Pacific and their interconnections
- Analyze and compare the **impact** of these challenges on population health across jurisdictions
- Highlight **strategies** to address these challenges and identify **ongoing gaps and policy needs** to build sustainability and resilience

Methodology

Country reports were compiled using a common **research framework** developed by PHSSR's academic partner, the London School of Economics, and revised by CAPRI for the Asia-Pacific context. The framework consists of seven domains:

1. Population health
2. Environmental sustainability
3. Workforce
4. Medicines and technologies
5. Service delivery
6. Health system financing
7. Health system governance

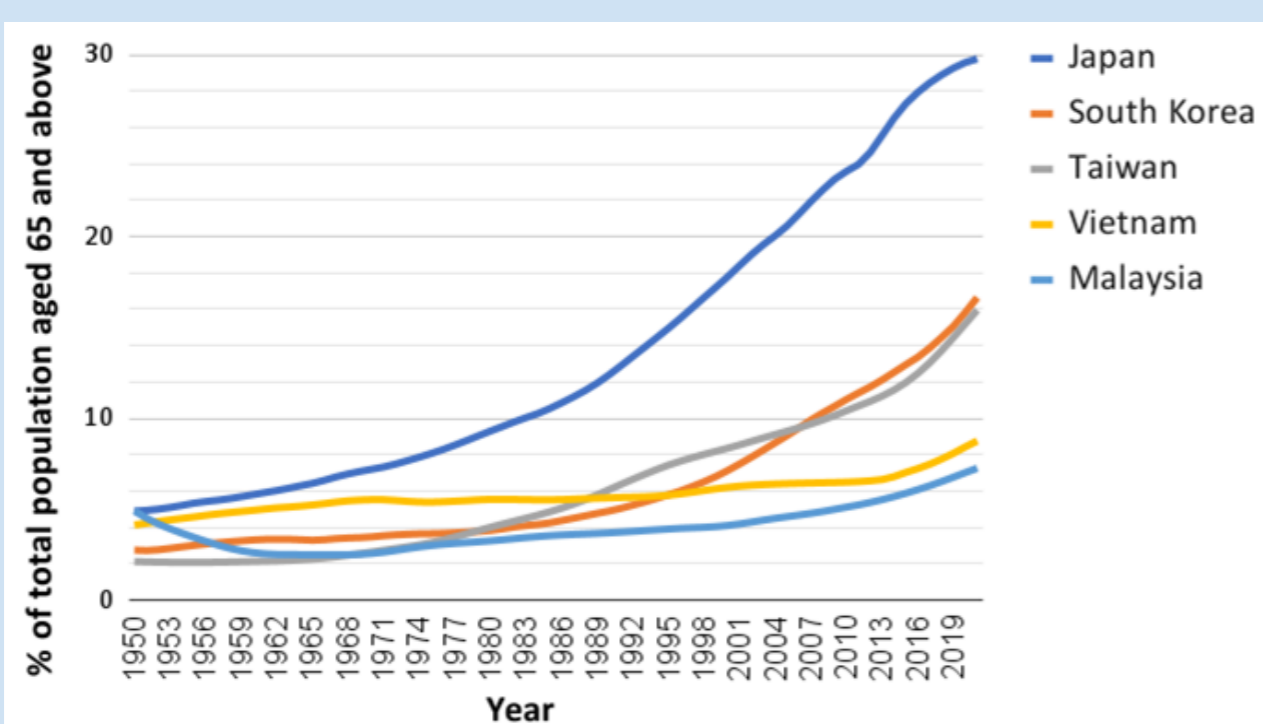
Research teams in each country applied this framework based on an extensive literature review and interviews with a cross-sectoral group of stakeholders. From the country reports, we extracted key findings and overarching themes for Asia-Pacific health systems.

Key Findings

We identified several common trends in health and healthcare in the Asia-Pacific region:

Aging societies

- Populations in the Asia-Pacific are **rapidly aging**, driven by rising life expectancies and declining birth rates.
- Population aging and decline are **affecting sustainable financing** of national health insurance systems and **increasing demand for long-term care** (LTC).
- Governments have implemented policies to address these issues, such as LTC insurance (e.g., in South Korea and Japan) and community-based care (e.g., in Japan). However, gaps in infrastructure, workforce, and care coordination persist.



Key Findings

Climate change

- The region, particularly the PICTs, is **highly vulnerable to the impacts of climate change**, including rising sea levels that endanger infrastructure and drinking water, ocean warming and acidification that threaten food security, and climate-induced anxiety. Other countries are also experiencing increases in temperature-related illnesses and vector-borne diseases.
- Although governments have introduced various policy interventions and initiatives, such as Fiji's National Climate Change and Health Strategic Action Plan (2016), **ongoing public awareness and international commitment are indispensable** to mitigate the impacts of climate change.

Digital health

- Taiwan's My Health Bank application for storing personal health information and Vietnam's Public Health Portal with drug and treatment prices and details exemplify the **growing use of digital health**.
- **Telemedicine** use also increased during the COVID-19 pandemic, but further adoption requires a legal foundation for its use in Japan and South Korea. Low digital literacy and insufficient infrastructure pose challenges in lower-middle-income countries.
- The adoption of **electronic medical records** (EMR) varies across the region, with some countries adopting it widely (e.g., South Korea), others making strides (e.g., Malaysia), and yet others lacking a data-driven culture (e.g., Japan).

Workforce shortage

- Lower-middle-income countries, such as Vietnam and the PICTs, **lack the requisite number of healthcare workers** (HCWs) to meet basic healthcare needs, while higher-income countries such as Japan and South Korea **struggle to provide comprehensive care** due to lack of primary care and LTC workers.
- **Difficult working conditions and insufficient investment** in training result in high turnover and uneven distribution of HCWs. Consequently, lower-income countries, such as the PICTs, see many HCWs lured to other countries.
- Diverse initiatives to improve workplace well-being and staff retention, circulation of HCWs across regions within a country (e.g., in Vietnam), and task shifting (e.g., in Malaysia) have been helpful short-term solutions, but sustained efforts are needed.

Conclusion

Governments in the Asia-Pacific will need to adopt a comprehensive and forward-looking approach for building sustainable and resilience health systems in the region, which includes:

- **Community engagement:** Empower individuals and communities to take ownership of their health;
- **Cross-sectoral governance:** Bring together stakeholders across ministries and organizations to streamline decision-making and address healthcare's multifaceted challenges; and
- **Pan-regional collaboration:** Foster knowledge exchange, share best practices, and develop innovative solutions across borders.

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