

Southeast Asia's Pressing Healthcare Challenges: How Innovation is Shaping the Future of Care and Driving Growth in Medical Technologies in the Region

02 February 2026, Bangkok, Thailand: Southeast Asia is rapidly emerging as a global economic powerhouse, with rising affluence, improved health awareness, and shifting demographics driving unprecedented demand for healthcare services. Despite this growth, healthcare spending in the region remains relatively low—averaging just 4–7% of GDP compared to over 12% in high-income countries.¹ The region faces a dual challenge: a rapidly ageing population and a surge in non-communicable diseases (NCDs) such as diabetes and cardiovascular conditions, which are straining existing healthcare systems and creating an urgent need for innovative solutions.

A unique region with its unique challenges and opportunities

While rising income levels suggest improved affordability of healthcare services, Southeast Asia faces distinct challenges, including insufficient healthcare infrastructure in rural areas, workforce shortages and the migration of healthcare professionals and specialists, high out-of-pocket costs for patients despite government health coverage initiatives, and an increasing burden of non-communicable diseases.

Strengthening public-private partnerships is emerging as a vital strategy to enhance healthcare efficiency and equity across Southeast Asia, enabling governments and private sectors to pool resources and expertise. Simultaneously, countries like Malaysia and Thailand are capitalising on their advanced healthcare systems to attract medical tourists, driving significant investment into the sector. Additionally, the rapid adoption of digital health innovations, including telemedicine, AI-powered diagnostics, and mobile health apps, is revolutionising healthcare delivery, particularly in urban areas, by improving accessibility, efficiency, and patient outcomes.²



Image Caption: Dr. Paradorn Kulkliang addresses the direction and growth of Thailand's private hospital sector at the WHX Bangkok Seminar, 27 January 2026.

At a recently organised seminar in Bangkok by WHX Bangkok and Medtec Southeast Asia, leading trade events organised by Informa Markets, these themes were discussed by prominent industry leaders. “Thailand’s private hospital industry is accelerating growth through a diversified strategy focused on centres of excellence, digital healthcare innovation, and targeted network expansion. Investment in specialised treatment centres for complex diseases, alongside smart virtual hospital initiatives and AI-enabled diagnostics, is enabling providers to deliver higher-value care while improving efficiency. At the same time, expansion into high-potential locations, including the Eastern Economic Corridor, is positioning private hospitals to meet rising demand from urban populations, industrial clients, and international patients—reinforcing Thailand’s role as a regional healthcare hub.” mentioned Dr. Paradon Kulkliang Deputy CEO: Samitivej and BNH Group of Hospitals Hospital Director Samitivej Sriracha Hospital, Samitivej Chonburi Hospital



Image Caption: Ms. Waranchalee Suwanpimolkul delivers a presentation on trends in medical device manufacturing and the development of Thai entrepreneurs’ capabilities at the Medtec Southeast Asia Seminar on 27 January 2026.

Furthermore, during the seminar, the panel also addressed the rise in opportunities for the medical device manufacturing sector. “Buyer power remains particularly high in the finished medical device segment, where hospitals, distributors, and healthcare systems place strong pressure on pricing and performance. Meanwhile, OEM manufacturers with proven technical and regulatory capabilities are better positioned to balance supplier relationships and build long-term partnerships. With substitution risks and switching options widely available, the market increasingly rewards companies that invest in regulatory compliance, manufacturing excellence, and specialised capabilities.” Ms. Waranchalee Suwanpimolkul, Medical Devices Industry Cluster Chair, Thai Subcontracting Promotion Association - (THAI SUBCON)

Growth opportunities for medical technologies

Southeast Asia's medical technology industry is experiencing rapid growth across several key segments. Diagnostic devices, particularly portable and point-of-care tools, are in high demand due to the increasing prevalence of non-communicable diseases (NCDs) like diabetes and cardiovascular conditions, especially in rural areas with limited healthcare infrastructure.¹ Telemedicine, mobile health apps, and AI-powered diagnostics are transforming healthcare, addressing workforce shortages and improving access to care.¹ Additionally, wearable health devices are gaining popularity among the growing middle class, offering real-time monitoring of vital signs and chronic conditions.²

Other growth areas include advanced medical imaging technologies like MRI and CT scans, which are essential for addressing both infectious diseases and NCDs, and robotics and automation, which are helping to alleviate workforce shortages and improve surgical precision.³ Furthermore, countries like Malaysia and Thailand are leveraging cutting-edge medical technologies to attract international patients, boosting medical tourism and driving investment in minimally invasive procedures and high-quality diagnostic tools.² These advancements position Southeast Asia as a dynamic hub for medical technology innovation, addressing critical healthcare challenges while fostering economic growth.

WHX Bangkok and Medtec Southeast Asia 2026 will take place this year in Bangkok at QSNCC from 8 to 10 July 2026 bringing together 18,000 attendees and from 54 countries.

WHX Bangkok and Medtec Southeast Asia

World Health Expo (WHX) Bangkok (formerly Medlab Asia and Asia Health), is an exhibition that covers medical devices, medical laboratories, hospital services and healthcare system. For more information visit worldhealthexpo.com/Bangkok

Medtec Southeast Asia is an exhibition that brings the world of Medtech—including manufacturing, machinery, parts, components, design, and advanced technologies. For more information visit inthehealthcareweek.com/medtecsea2026

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For Media enquiries, please contact:

Gautam Jatwani

Senior Marketing Manager

Informa Markets

Gautam.jatwani@informa.com

Notes to Editor / Source

¹ [National Library of Medicine](#)

² [P4H](#)

³ [National Library of Medicine](#)