

Advancing Global Healthcare in 2025:

Key Indicators and Malaysia's Perspective

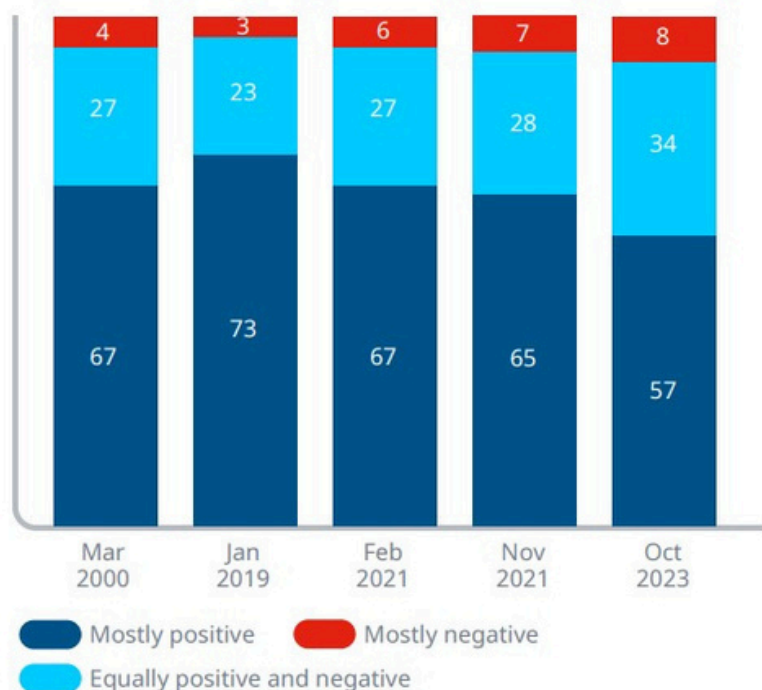


By Dr. June Choon

The IQVIA 2025 Indicators of Progress for Advancing Health Globally report offers an insightful analysis of key healthcare advancements, challenges, and measurable indicators to track progress. As Malaysia continues to refine its healthcare policies, this global perspective provides valuable lessons and benchmarks for our national strategies. I summarise the report's seven key indicators and relate them to the Malaysian healthcare context, offering specific examples and recommendations for moving forward.

1. Rebuilding Trust in Healthcare and Science

Exhibit 1: Effect of science on society



Source: Survey of U.S. adults conducted Sept. 25-October 1, 2023. "Americans' Trust in Scientists, Positive Views of Science, Continue to Decline."

Notes: Respondents who did not give an answer are not shown.

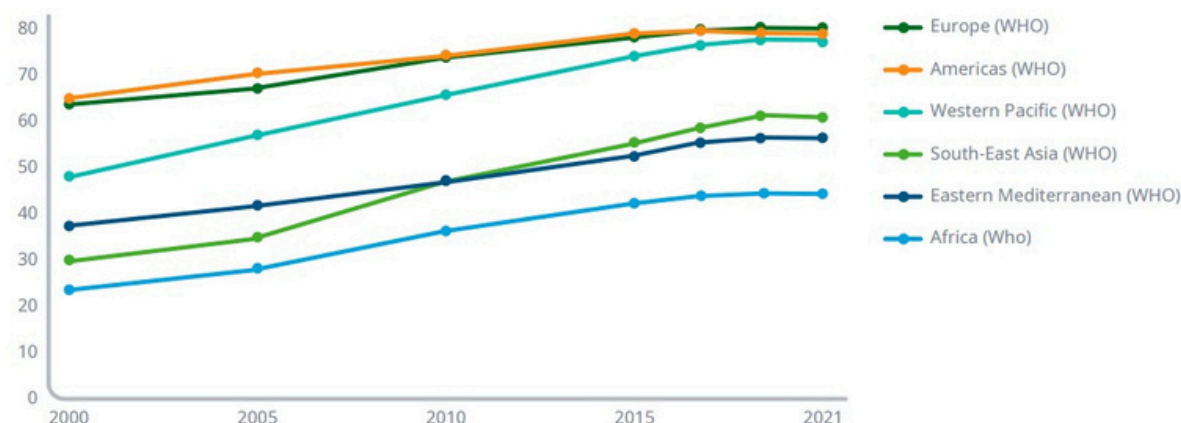
Trust in healthcare institutions is foundational to effective health systems. The report highlights a concerning global decline in public trust in science and healthcare providers. Surveys in the U.S. show trust in physicians and hospitals dropped from 71.5% in 2020 to 40.1% in 2024. In Europe, similar trends have been observed, where declining public confidence in vaccine programs has raised concerns among policymakers.

While Malaysia has maintained relatively high trust in public healthcare

institutions, misinformation during the COVID-19 pandemic revealed vulnerabilities. The rapid spread of vaccine hesitancy, fuelled by social media, demonstrated the urgent need for proactive public health communication strategies. The Ministry of Health Malaysia has made strides in addressing misinformation, but further collaboration with academic institutions and media outlets is needed to ensure accurate, science-based health communication reaches all demographics, including rural populations. Additionally, initiatives like community engagement programs and town hall discussions led by healthcare professionals can help restore public confidence.

2. Advancing Universal Healthcare Coverage (UHC)

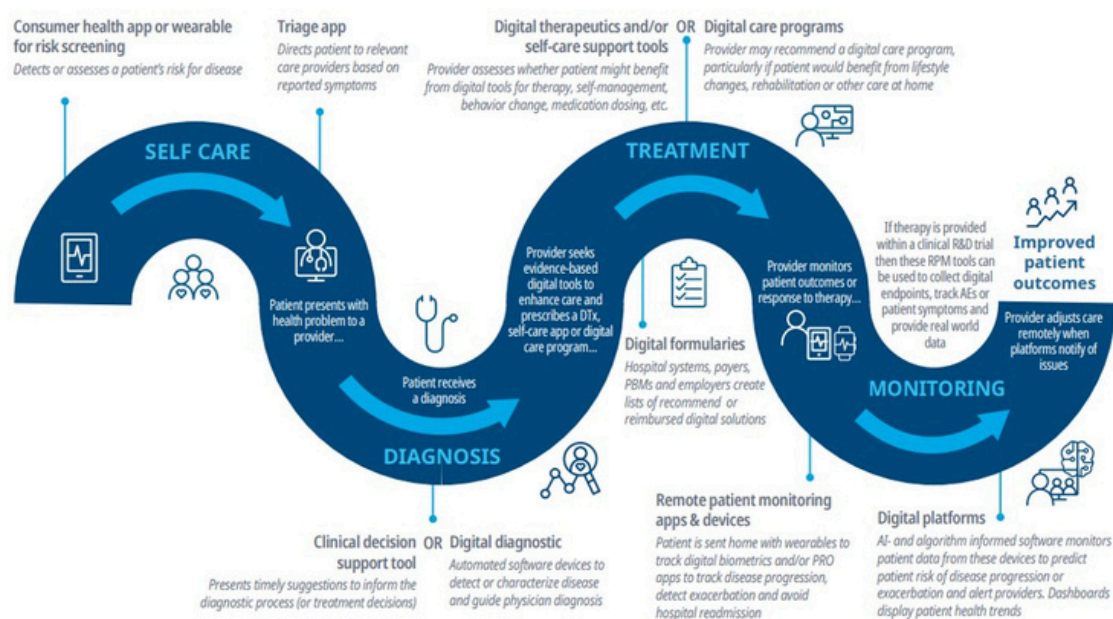
The global UHC Service Coverage Index aims to reach 75/100 by 2025. Many low- and middle-income countries (LMICs) are still far from this target, with large disparities in access to essential health services. The World Health Organization (WHO) notes that more than half of the world's population lacks access to essential health services, and out-of-pocket healthcare costs push nearly 100 million people into extreme poverty annually.

Exhibit 2: Universal Health Coverage Service Coverage Index by WHO region, 2000–2021

Source: Our World in Data <https://ourworldindata.org/grapher/universal-health-coverage-index?tab=chart>

Malaysia has made significant strides in providing affordable care through government hospitals and clinics. However, gaps remain in ensuring equitable access, especially for the B40 (bottom 40% income group) and underserved populations in Sabah and Sarawak. The Skim Peduli Kesihatan (PeKa B40) program has improved access to essential health services, yet more targeted interventions, such as mobile healthcare units and telemedicine platforms, are necessary to bridge the urban-rural healthcare divide. Additionally, incentivising private sector collaboration through public-private partnerships (PPPs) can further expand healthcare reach and quality.

3. Closing the Primary Care Gap

Exhibit 3: Diagnosis, treatment and monitoring in the digital world

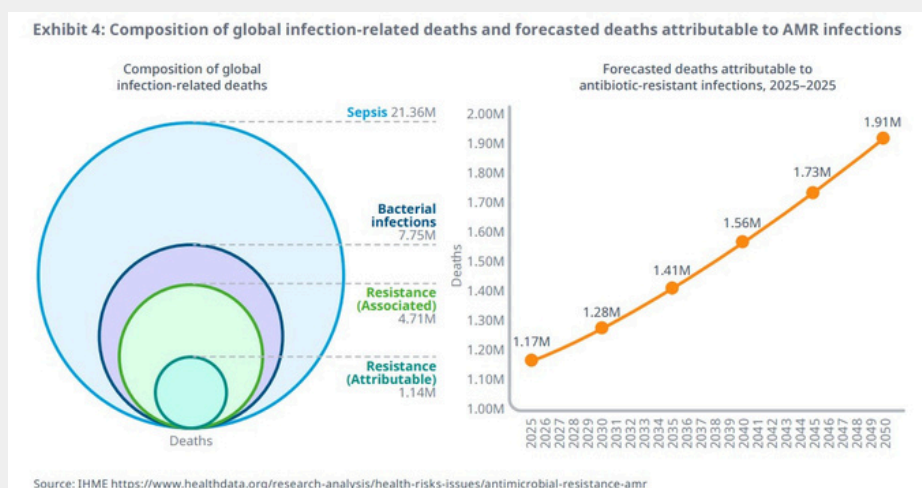
Source: Digital Health Trends 2024, IQVIA Institute, June 2024.

Notes: Remote patient monitoring (RPM); Adverse events (AEs); Pharmacy benefit manager (PBMs); Patient reported outcomes (PRO).

Primary care is the backbone of an effective health system, yet many countries face physician shortages. The WHO projects a global shortfall of 10 million health workers by 2030, impacting access to preventive and primary care. In sub-Saharan Africa, physician density remains critically low, with only 2 doctors per 10,000 people.

Malaysia faces a growing shortage of general practitioners, particularly in rural and remote areas. The government's recent initiative to train and deploy Community Health Volunteers has been a positive step, but more is needed to attract and retain family medicine specialists. Expanding the scope of practice for pharmacists and nurse practitioners could alleviate some of the burden on primary care physicians. Additionally, integrating artificial intelligence-powered telehealth solutions, such as the DoctorOnCall platform, can help improve accessibility and efficiency in primary care services.

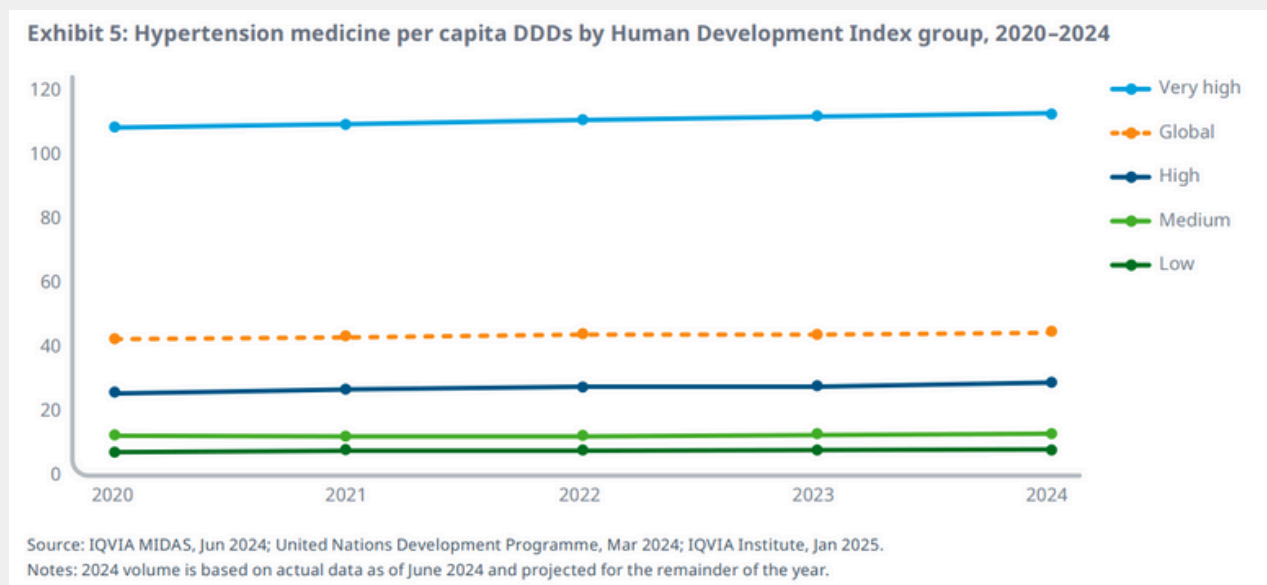
4. Addressing Long-Standing but Unresolved Healthcare Issues



Antimicrobial resistance (AMR) and pandemic preparedness remain global concerns. The passage of the PASTEUR Act in the U.S. and the finalisation of the Pandemic

Preparedness Treaty by WHO will be key markers of progress. According to the report, drug-resistant infections currently contribute to nearly 5 million deaths annually, with projections rising if no urgent action is taken. Malaysia has been proactive in addressing AMR through initiatives like the National Action Plan on Antimicrobial Resistance (NAP AMR) 2017-2022. However, enforcement of antibiotic stewardship programs in private healthcare settings remains inconsistent. More stringent policies on antibiotic prescriptions, coupled with public awareness campaigns, are necessary. Furthermore, Malaysia's preparedness for future pandemics needs to go beyond vaccine procurement; strengthening local vaccine manufacturing capabilities, such as those at the Institute for Medical Research (IMR) Malaysia, will be essential in ensuring long-term self-sufficiency.

5. Delivering the Right Care for the Right Patient



Many countries struggle with underuse and overuse of medical treatments. Hypertension remains undertreated globally, with only 21% of diagnosed patients achieving control. The report notes that increasing hypertension treatment rates to 50% globally could prevent 76 million deaths by 2050.

Hypertension, diabetes, and cardiovascular diseases remain Malaysia's leading health burdens. Despite the availability of effective, low-cost medications, many patients fail to adhere to treatment due to lack of awareness or financial constraints. The National Strategic Plan for NCDs must be strengthened to ensure wider accessibility of combination antihypertensive medications. Expanding pharmacist-led medication therapy adherence clinics (MTACs) and subsidising essential non-communicable diseases (NCD) medications through programs like Madani Medical Scheme could significantly improve disease management.

6. Moving 'Upstream' with Disease Interception

Disease interception focuses on early intervention before symptoms appear. The number of scientific publications on this topic is expected to increase by 50% in 2025, reflecting growing interest in preventive healthcare. The report highlights that advancements in AI-driven disease prediction models are accelerating global efforts in this area.

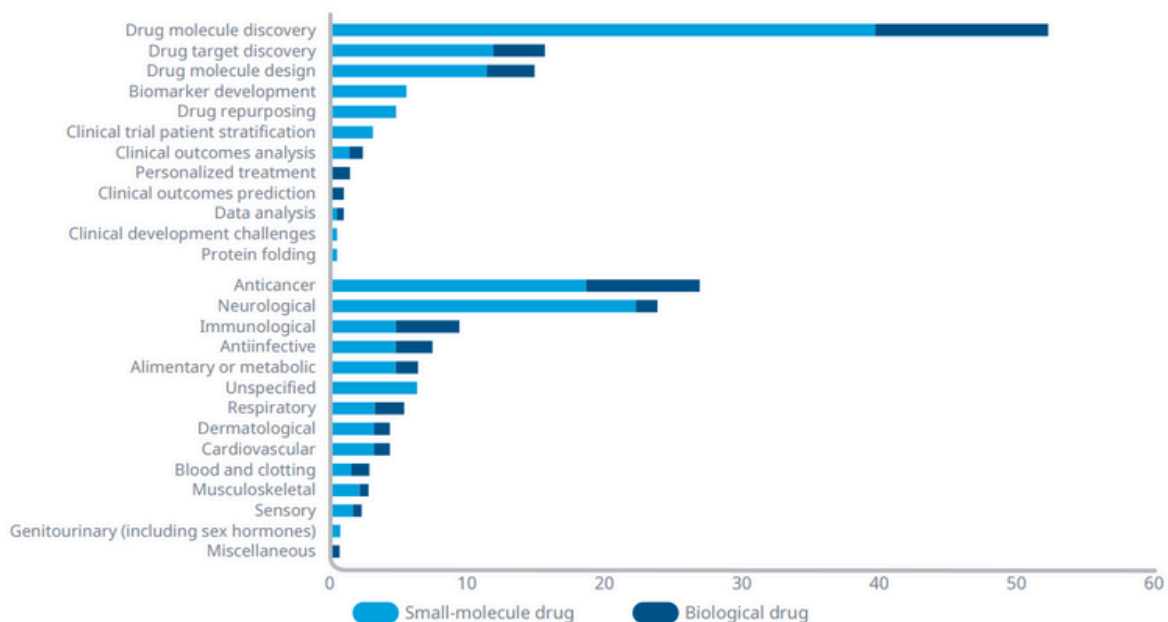
Malaysia's PeKa B40 and Screening for Life initiatives emphasise early detection of diseases, yet participation rates remain low.

Exhibit 6: Rethinking disease progression and role of interception

Source: IQVIA Institute, Jan 2025.

A cultural shift toward preventive healthcare is needed, supported by nationwide screening campaigns and incentives for early health check-ups. The adoption of AI-driven predictive analytics in public hospitals could enhance risk stratification and personalised prevention strategies. Additionally, genetic screening initiatives, particularly for hereditary conditions like thalassemia and breast cancer, should be expanded under Malaysia's public health framework.

7. Advancing AI in Drug Development

Exhibit 7: Purpose of Artificial Intelligence use

Source: Druedahl LC, Price WN, Minssen T, Sarpatwari A. Use of Artificial Intelligence in Drug Development. JAMA Netw Open. 2024;7(5):e2414139. doi:10.1001/jamanetworkopen.2024.14139.

AI is transforming drug discovery, with over 300 investigational drugs expected to emerge from AI-driven research in 2025. The report highlights that AI-based drug discovery is gaining momentum globally, with a projected regulatory approval of at least one AI-discovered drug by 2025.

AI in drug development remains nascent in Malaysia, but there is potential for significant growth. The establishment of AI-driven bioinformatics hubs within Malaysian universities and research institutes could accelerate progress. Collaborations between academia, the MOH, and the pharmaceutical industry can facilitate AI adoption in clinical trials and regulatory decision-making. Furthermore, government incentives for AI startups focused on healthcare innovation could spur research in precision medicine.

Takeaway

Malaysia's healthcare system has demonstrated resilience and adaptability, but challenges persist. Aligning our strategies with global progress markers will be crucial in strengthening healthcare policies and delivery models. Strengthening trust, expanding access to healthcare, addressing workforce shortages, tackling AMR, and leveraging AI are critical steps toward a more sustainable healthcare future.

As academics, our role is pivotal in shaping Malaysia's health policies. By actively contributing to research, policy advocacy, and healthcare innovation, we can drive meaningful change to ensure equitable and high-quality healthcare for all Malaysians.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Dr. Choon is an academic and health economics researcher. She serves on various advisory boards for multinational pharmaceutical companies and Ministry of Health. Her passion lies on improving patient access to life-saving innovative medicines in Malaysia.

