

Advancing Preventive Health in Vietnam



What is preventive health?

Prevention strategies enabled by the healthcare ecosystem, including policies, programs, and interventions that are delivered, facilitated, or implemented by various healthcare ecosystem players. The World Health Organization defines prevention as “approaches and activities aimed at reducing the likelihood that a disease or disorder will affect an individual, interrupting or slowing the progress of the disorder or reducing disability.”

Why should Vietnam focus on preventive health?

The **National Strategy to Protect, Care for and Improve People’s Health 2030** envisions a “prevention is better than cure” strategy for a healthier population in Vietnam, with significant implications for preventive health. To achieve these goals, it is important to assess the present state of preventive health holistically through a three-prong framework: *Policy, Interventions, and Financing*.

I. Policy Insights

Current Landscape:

inadequate implementation of a strong noncommunicable disease (NCD) prevention strategy:



Despite efforts, gaps in accessibility, coverage, and resources hinder success. Recent studies highlight critical gaps, such as limited accessibility to NCD treatment services and inadequate coverage of preventive services aimed at controlling risk factors.



The lack of sufficient healthcare personnel and limited resources in primary healthcare facilities have compromised the quality and reach of NCD care, particularly in rural and underserved areas.

Prolonged regulatory process for vaccines:



Vietnam’s vaccine regulatory process is lengthy, taking over four years due to extensive requirements, including multiple assessments and approvals, and continuous safety and efficacy reporting, which burdens both the industry and regulatory bodies.



The recent Pharma Law Amendment offers a potential pathway for reliance in reviewing, which could shorten the timeline, highlighting the need to address these challenges to improve vaccine access and ensure efficient delivery.

Pandemic preparedness framework is not up to date.



Gaps in the legal and policy framework for emergency management, leading to inefficiencies. Despite some proactive efforts, challenges in mobilizing, managing, and utilizing resources were evident due to inconsistent, delayed, and insufficient policy implementation.

Recommendations:

Recommendation to Align National Strategies with Budget and Expedite Vaccine Regulatory Processes:

- Align Vietnam’s national health strategies with budget allocations and detailed operational plans to ensure effective implementation of national plans
- Identify regulatory efficiencies and streamline processes to expedite vaccine approval processes to ensure timely access to preventive health measures.

Update national policies to strengthen pandemic preparedness:

Enhance and modernize the legal and policy framework to address future pandemics effectively.



II. Access Insights

Current Landscape:

Continued under-utilization of primary care services:



Vietnam relies heavily on hospital-based care due to poor primary care quality, causing inefficiencies and overcrowding as over half of preventive and outpatient visits occur in hospitals.



Incentives for hospitals and minimal patient copayments drive this model, leading to a lack of care coordination, with patients bypassing local facilities for hospital services even for simple needs.

Early success in vaccinations show signs of slowing.



Vietnam’s childhood immunization progress has slowed, with over 187,000 children under one year old unvaccinated in 2021, placing the country among the top 20 with high “zero-dose” children rates.



Urban children are 1.5 times more likely to miss vaccinations than rural children (6.3% vs. 4.2%), and children from the poorest households are nearly twice as likely to go without vaccinations compared to wealthier families (13.5% vs. 6.6%).

Recommendations:

Incentivize preventive health-seeking behavior at the primary care level and reduce reliance on hospitals.

- Raise awareness and incentivize individuals to engage in preventive health services like vaccinations, screenings, and diagnostics.
- Increased investments in training and compensating healthcare workers, and improving primary care infrastructure will attract people to local clinics, fostering a proactive approach to health and reducing reliance on hospitals.

Urgently implement catch-up campaigns to restore vaccination rates to pre-COVID levels.

- Focus efforts on identifying and vaccinating children who missed vaccinations during the pandemic.

- Promote and increase vaccine uptake throughout the life course, including among adults.

Develop and publicize a preventive health services list.

- Enhance public awareness and utilization of preventive health services by providing a comprehensive list of available preventive health services across primary, secondary, and tertiary levels.

III. Financing Insights

Preventive health financing targets are unmet.



Vietnam’s preventive health budget in 2022 was 636,886 million VND, making up 28.6% of the total health budget, falling short of the 30% target due to delayed funding and a focus on curative services.

Social Health Insurance (SHI) excludes preventive services.



SHI covers treatment but excludes preventive services like health screenings, with preventive measures funded separately, leading to lower uptake.



The fee-for-service payment model does not incentivize preventive care, limiting access to essential services such as health management and disease screening.

Recommendations:

Enhance local capacity for implementation of preventive health measures and fund utilization.

- Equip provincial and municipal government offices with tools, technical assistance, and management support to implement preventive health measures effectively, ensuring at least 30% of the health budget is allocated to preventive healthcare.
- Address challenges like insufficient program development, delayed funding, and prioritization of curative services by working with local offices to establish clear responsibilities and timelines for effective fund allocation and utilization.

Provide clarity on the flow of funds and coverage of services for preventive health.

- Clarify the flow of funds and coverage for preventive health services, as current funds are underutilized due to a lack of transparency regarding available interventions.
- Policymakers should either integrate preventive health services into the SHI package or clearly define their coverage as part of a separate initiative, ensuring better fund management and utilization by local governments.



Healthcare systems today are at a crossroads. For Vietnam to ensure sustainability of its healthcare system, a preventive health approach is no longer optional; it’s a necessity.

Read our full report, *Advancing Preventive Health in Southeast Asia: Recommendations for Malaysia, the Philippines, and Vietnam*

