

Conference Report Executive Summary

To ensure access to innovative and affordable medicines for all, healthcare issues must be prioritized at the governmental level. There has been dramatic progress in medicine and pharmacy in recent decades, but the positive outcomes of these advances are not accessible to citizens of North Macedonia, which is particularly evident regarding access to medicines.

Although several reforms have been undertaken to close the gap between the current state of play and the critical need for medicines, there is still a lot of work to be done because applied approaches have been based on goodwill rather than a systematic solution. Ultimately, it is crucial to understand that the problem that needs to be solved in this regard goes beyond access to medicines.

Here are the four key conclusions drawn from the conference:

- **Establishing a functional reimbursement system in the healthcare sector in North Macedonia must be supported by digitalization and the introduction of managed entry agreements.**

Unlocking the reimbursement process for medicines is a challenging task, especially given the duration of the deadlock in these processes. Strong support and determination from the Government provide a great deal of optimism that this deadlock will be broken as soon as possible. The ultimate goal, however, must be to develop and implement a systematic solution that will set up conditions for regular determinations and updates of the positive list of medicines. Adopting a new rulebook related to the positive list of medicines is a key prerequisite for all endeavors in that direction, but it is only the beginning of the road.

That the situation in the country is alarming in terms of access to medicines was confirmed by the patients' association and data analysis for reimbursements. The latter showed that North Macedonia has a significantly lower number of molecules available among the leading ATC1.

Alongside discussing positive practices from other countries, the importance of digitalization in the healthcare system was particularly stressed in relation to access to medicines, as well as the introduction of managed entry agreements as a proven means to afford expensive medicines.

- **Data standardization, structuring, and systematization in the healthcare sector as well as facilitation of the exchange of data between stakeholders may improve the utilization of current healthcare data.**

The common opinion in developing countries such as North Macedonia is that there is no good quality local data. Although it might be a fair statement, it is also true that in these countries there is limited expertise on where the data exist, how to access the data, how to process the data, and how to use the evidence from real-world data to improve clinical and policy decision making. Additionally, the lack of communication

and collaboration among public institutions in terms of exchanging data and sharing knowledge is noted. Another issue that requires immediate attention in the national healthcare system is that data collection is extremely fragmented in the sector due to the use of different systems which also contributes to higher costs. A key recommendation on harnessing data for better healthcare is to use existing data before collecting new data even if local data is limited to low quality. Making an effort to use the data is important because by doing so it will ultimately provide insight into how to improve the quality of the data.

- **Improvements in efficiency are key to ensuring sustainable funding in North Macedonia's healthcare sector.**

Despite all the investments and the increased spending on healthcare every year, the state of play in this sector is not improving. In addition, public healthcare institutions remain to be debt generators. Therefore, there is an urgent need to fundamentally change the concept of the functioning and financing of the healthcare sector in the country.

It was strongly underlined that the fragmentation of the healthcare sector in the country is one of the main drawbacks to ensuring efficiency, especially in terms of medicines. Hence, it was highly recommended to consolidate financing and medicine procurement into one place because it will give public institutions greater purchasing power. Robust primary healthcare has been pointed out as another critical aspect that requires attention because the insufficient capacity of the primary care system is one of the pressing ongoing weaknesses. Further development of the e-healthcare system and e-healthcare services has been suggested as a crucial factor that will contribute to improving the efficiency of the healthcare sector. It was also emphasized that alternative sources of healthcare funding should be considered.

- **Access to affordable and innovative healthcare services and medicines requires reform of the healthcare system and strengthening institutional capacities.**

Healthcare underperformance is often attributed to the inability of the systems to respond adequately during the pandemic, but the unfortunate truth is that healthcare systems were underperforming before the pandemic. Evidently, healthcare systems are not designed to cope with challenging situations. To reform the health sector and strengthen institutional capacities, a 5I framework consisting of five elements has been provided:

<i>Institutional logic</i>	Change the way of thinking regarding investments in the healthcare sector: from costs to investment.
<i>Inclusive partnerships</i>	Strategic public-private partnerships built on inclusion, mutual trust, shared values and solidarity.
<i>Integrated action</i>	Multi-sectoral action to ensure proper responsiveness and resilience to emerging and existing health threats.
<i>Investment in health</i>	Demonstrate, measure and quantify the health, economic and societal benefits of the investments in the sector.
<i>Innovation access at scale</i>	Creating value by enhancing access to innovative medicines and technologies at the population level: value for money and value for many.

The 1st AmCham Healthcare Conference has been recognized as a step forward in achieving multisectoral collaboration that will contribute to identifying the most adequate and feasible health policies for the benefit of all.