

# **Singapore and Hong Kong National Healthy Longevity Comparative Analysis**

***East vs. East***

# Health Care System in Hong Kong

The healthcare system in Hong Kong has high-quality private and public healthcare tracks. Together public and private health care systems serve roughly 7.4 million people. The delivery of health services is influenced by the patient's insurance coverage or financial means. When access to the public system is limited due to increased demand, health insurance coverage becomes a determinant factor for healthcare access.

## 1. High quality of provided services and efficiency.

- Life expectancy is one of the highest in the world. According to the Department of Health in Hong Kong, life expectancy has reached 81.9 years for males and 87.6 years for females in 2017.
- Infant mortality rate and maternal mortality rate are among the lowest in the world.
- With 43 public hospitals 12 private hospitals in a densely populated city, healthcare is easily accessible (doctor home-visits are not common).

## 2. Healthcare is a dual-track system.

- A public system provides over 90% of all in-patient bed-days and 30% outpatient service according to the Department of Health in Hong Kong.
- A very expensive private system takes on 70% of primary care services and only 10% of in-patient service according to the Department of Health in Hong Kong.

## 3. Private health insurance is one of the most expensive

- While there is a six-month waiting period for some outpatient clinics in the public system, private outpatient clinics can usually take patients without delay. However, the private clinics have their own market value and often charge their clients higher rates. Private insurance companies tend to negotiate their rates with individual clinics, or patients can pay out of pocket. Yet, self-pay is only possible for people with sufficient means and makes healthcare services less accessible to people with limited financial resources.

## 4. Population faces very long wait times in the public sector

- All patients in Hong Kong have access to public healthcare services when they are in need, but increasingly with delay. E.g. people have to wait 8 to 30 months for a cataract operation.

# Current Challenges for Hong Kong's Healthcare System

## 1. Shortage of doctors and other health professionals in public sector.

A key issue is that the supply of doctors has not kept pace with demographic trends and the increasing demands of an ageing population. It expects a chronic shortage of 300 doctors at all times. In fact, a strategic review of health care staff planning, released by the Food and Health Bureau in 2017, predicted Hong Kong would be short of 500 doctors in 2020.

## 2. Timeliness of healthcare services.

Timeliness for healthcare services is closely linked to staff shortages. When, for example, a patient with knee pain consults a primary care physician, and a referral for physiotherapy services is issued, the patient's treatment in an overcrowded public system would be delayed unless the patient decides to go to a private clinic (at higher cost or with a partial subsidy through health care vouchers). In Hong Kong, the elderly population is particularly vulnerable, facing significant difficulties in accessing primary healthcare services. For example, elderly living in Hong Kong's lower socio-economic status neighbourhoods are more likely to be hospitalised for avoidable healthcare problems, thereby not only increasing the cost of healthcare services but also creating a heavier burden due to the shortage of staff. Given the need for improving Hong Kong's health services, the biggest challenge the city will face in the near future is to keep delivering high quality healthcare in a timely fashion and to maintain and enhance the population's health (e.g., health promotion and prevention).

## 3. Aging population with growing demand.

One of the major challenges for Hong Kong to sustain its global city status is to find ways to manage significant demographic changes in society. According to "Hong Kong Population Projections 2015-2064", the number of elderly people, those aged 65 or older, in Hong Kong will reach 2.58 million by 2064, around 35.9% of the population. The work force, those aged 15 to 64, will shrink to 3.92 million, or 54.6% of the population).

## 4. Lack of public-private partnerships in healthcare sector.

Primary health care in Hong Kong is not doing enough to alleviate the pressure on hospitals. The reasons for this minimal contribution lie deep in the structure of the health care system. Public clinics, with their limited scale, are not able to provide care to patients with lower socio-economic status, thus increasing their risk of hospitalisation. Without a comprehensive health care financing programme for citizens, the private sector is not adequate to provide primary care to those most at risk.

Sources:

Healthy Matters

China Perspectives

pdf

# Health Facts of Hong Kong and Singapore

Healthcare Statistics for 2018	Hong Kong	Singapore
Land Area (Sq. km)	1 106.7	710.0
Mid-year Population ('000)	7 451.0	5 810.0
Population Density (Persons per sq. km)	6 890	8175
Annual Population Growth Rate (%)	0.80	0.81
Crude Birth Rate (Registered births per 1 000 mid-year population)	7.3	3.9
Crude Death Rate (Registered deaths per 1 000 mid-year population)	6.4	2.1
Infant Mortality Rate (per 1 000 registered live births)	1.5	1.61
Life Expectancy at Birth (Years)	84.6	82.9
Overweight and obesity (BMI>23.0), %	38.8	36.2
Healthcare Expenditure (as % of GDP)	6.2	5.6
Out-of-pocket Expenditure (% of current healthcare expenditures)	36.0	31.2
Age Dependency Ratio (% of working-age population)	40	30
Number of Doctors (Per 1000 of Population)	1.97	2.37

The life expectancies at birth for both sexes in Singapore and Hong Kong have steadily increased during the past 50 years to 82.9 and 84.6 years in 2018 respectively. Both cities have reduced the rates of infant mortality, which are among the lowest in the world in 2018.

Singapore has younger population, which is explained by lower age dependency ratio. Hong Kong' population is exposed to higher risks of premature deaths that are caused by many serious diseases. They are cancer, heart disease, stroke, respiratory disease, kidney disease, dementia, arthritis, and osteoporosis, which increase prevalence with age.

Singapore has slightly lower level of overweight and obesity comparing to Hong Kong. Both cities show great results in smoking rates reduction.

Both in Hong Kong and Singapore total health expenditure rises faster than the corresponding increase in Gross Domestic Product (GDP) in recent years. In Hong Kong, total health expenditure as a percentage of GDP went up from 3.6% in 1989/90 to 6.2% in 2017/18.

Sources:

Department of Health

Statistics Singapore

# Singapore's Health Care System Beats Hong Kong's in its Efficiency and Affordability

Healthcare Outcomes Metrics (2016)			
Country	Life Expectancy	Infant Mortality per 1 000 population	Maternal Mortality per 100 000 population
Singapore	82.8	2.1	10.0
Hong Kong	84.2	1.5	1.8
Healthcare Spending & Affordability (2016)			
Country	Government Health Spendings, %	Government Health Spendings, as % of Budget	Out-of-pocket Expenditure as % of GNI
Singapore	54	14	1.5
Hong Kong	50	12	1.9
Healthcare Accessibility (2016)			
Country	Doctors per 10 000 population	Nurses per 1 000 population	Hospital Beds per 1 000 population
Singapore	23.1	7.1	2.5
Hong Kong	20.0	7.9	3.7

Both citizens of Singapore and Hong Kong enjoy high-quality healthcare, live long lives with low maternal and infant mortality rates. Singapore is known for having exceptional medical care and an enviable health insurance system. In contrast, Hong Kong has expensive private healthcare that is not affordable for lower socio-economic groups. Singapore has the 5th highest rate of physicians and nurses per capita, suggesting that health services are abundant. Hong Kong has shortage of doctors and other health professionals in public sector. In Hong Kong, the elderly population is particularly vulnerable, facing significant difficulties in accessing primary healthcare services.

# Singapore's Health Care System Beats Hong Kong's in its Efficiency, Affordability and Quality

Measures	Hong Kong	Singapore
<b>Healthy Longevity</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>✓ Life Expectancy in Hong Kong is 84.6 years in 2018.</li> <li>✓ Improved medical treatment, diet, resilience, adaptability, healthy lifestyles and technology contribute to longer lifespan.</li> <li>✗ The major contribution to the improvement in life expectancy in Hong Kong for both males and females was mainly attributable to the older population.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>✓ Life Expectancy in Singapore is 82.9 years in 2018.</li> <li>✓ The increase in Singaporeans' life expectancy can be attributed to its health system and how key health issues are addressed.</li> <li>✓ Most of the improvement is due to reduction in years of life lost, which means the burden of early death has declined.</li> </ul>
<b>Ageing Population</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>✗ Hong Kong faces a declining labour force, shrinking average family size, rising elderly dependency ratio and ageing population, the demand for elderly-related goods and services will keep increasing.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>✗ Singapore's population will age rapidly. The median age is expected to rise from 40.6 in 2010 to 53.7 in 2050. Institute of Policy Studies revealed that today's seniors aged 65 and above consider an amount of at least S\$1,379 each month to be necessary to meet basic needs.</li> </ul>
<b>Leading Causes of Death</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>✗ Six types of non-communicable diseases, namely, cancers, diseases of heart, cerebrovascular diseases, chronic lower respiratory diseases, injuries and poisoning, and diabetes mellitus, accounted for 59.3% of all registered deaths in 2017. Structure of major causes of death is more diversified comparing to Singapore.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>✓ Three types of non-communicable diseases, cancer, pneumonia and ischaemic heart diseases, accounted 67.7% of all registered in 2017. The crude birth rate is lower comparing to Hong Kong.</li> </ul>
<b>Support of Older People</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>✓ The concept of age-friendly cities and communities had high level political commitment. Age-friendly platforms have been established in all 18 districts, with older adults empowered to raise their concerns, advocate change, negotiate with local government departments, and report to the media to raise awareness of public concerns.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>✓ Given the corresponding demand on healthcare services from an ageing population, Singapore is committed to bring healthcare closer to home and support Singaporeans to age well in their community, make healthy lifestyle choices, and get good healthcare at the best affordable value.</li> </ul>

# Singapore's Health Care System Beats Hong Kong's in its Efficiency, Affordability and Quality

Measures	Hong Kong	Singapore
<b>Healthcare Financing</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>✗ Total health expenditure rises faster than the corresponding increase in Gross Domestic Product (GDP).</li> <li>✗ Total health expenditure amounted to 6.2% of GDP in 2018, with annual per capita spending at \$22,672.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>✗ Total health expenditure rises faster than the corresponding increase in Gross Domestic Product (GDP).</li> <li>✓ Total health expenditure amounted to 5.6% of GDP in 2018, with annual per capita spending at \$ 2,462.</li> </ul>
<b>Healthcare Coverage</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>✓ The government provides all public healthcare services free of charge or for a small fee.</li> <li>✗ Private health insurance is one of the most expensive in the world. It is essential to have a good private medical insurance. The private clinics have their own market value and often charge their clients higher rates.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>✓ Singapore citizens and permanent residents are entitled to subsidised healthcare services provided through government healthcare facilities.</li> <li>✗ Finding the right medical insurance policy can be a very time-consuming task and prone to error as insurance companies usually have many exclusions and exceptions in their coverage policies.</li> </ul>
<b>Care Delivery</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>✗ There is shortage of doctors and other health professionals in public sector. The supply of doctors has not kept pace with demographic trends and the increasing demands of an ageing population.</li> <li>✗ Timeliness for healthcare services.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>✓ The number of doctors here hit a new high of 2.37 per 1 000 population in 2018. With a greater need for healthcare professionals as Singapore's population grows and ages, the authorities have been actively recruiting foreigners to fill the gap.</li> </ul>
<b>Digitization of Healthcare</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>✓ The government has established an electronic health record refers to a record in electronic format containing health-related data of an individual.</li> <li>✓ There private digital initiatives to help shape its healthcare delivery model, optimise resources, and ultimately benefit society.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>✓ Singapore have taken steps in establishing a centralised National Electronic Health Record.</li> <li>✓ Singapore is piloting several health technology initiatives to help shape its healthcare delivery model, optimise resources, and ultimately benefit society.</li> </ul>