

Southeast Asia Health Security Roundtable Series: Improving Regional Health Security through Knowledge exchange & collaboration

# Virtual Roundtable Discussion Report

## Harnessing Insights for a Comprehensive Approach to Future Pandemic Preparedness

Over Zoom: 27 September 2024

This report was finalised on 21 November 2024



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## Introduction

The COVID-19 pandemic represents the most significant global health challenge in recent history, marked by rapid scientific and technological advances in response to the crisis. The 3 years of the pandemic has revealed stark contrasts in public health leadership and communication strategies, from evidence-based interventions to the challenges of widespread mis- and disinformation. The unprecedented scale of public health measures implemented globally has also transformed our understanding of health crisis management and response capabilities.

While dominant narratives have emerged primarily from high-income Western countries and major Asian economies such as India and China, the diverse experiences of Southeast Asian nations offer valuable yet overlooked perspectives. Within this context, the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) member states have developed distinctive approaches to pandemic management, yielding invaluable insights into the nuances of pandemic management and response. From the rapid deployment of vaccination campaigns to the establishment of regional surveillance networks and innovative community engagement, the pandemic experience offers a rich tapestry of lessons and opportunities for collaboration.

The Southeast Asia Health Security Roundtable series are jointly organized by the Saw Swee Hock School of Public Health (SSHSPH, National University of Singapore (NUS), Universitas Padjadjaran (UNPAD), Indonesia and the Health Intervention and Technology Assessment Program (HITAP), Thailand. They are sponsored primarily by Australia's Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade (DFAT), consisting of four Roundtables aiming to promote dialogue on pandemic preparedness, and on health security more broadly, in the Southeast Asia region. International and regional thought leaders are invited to share:

- Diverse experiences and challenges throughout the COVID-19 pandemic,
- Leadership models in the management of health security challenges at the country, regional and global levels, and
- Preparation for future outbreaks at the country level and coordination at the regional level.

Through such dialogues, country leaders can reflect upon and learn from each other's experiences, strengthening regional and national capacity development to detect and respond more effectively to infectious disease outbreaks.

Three Roundtables have been organized in person in ASEAN capitals:

- Economic Response to COVID-19 and Future Pandemics – Jakarta, 29-30 November 2023
- Health System Impact of Pandemics – Bangkok, 28-29 March 2024

- Leadership and Communication during Major Epidemics – Singapore, 24-25 May 2024

## Introduction Specific Objectives of the Virtual Roundtable

The fourth and final Roundtable was held via Zoom and brought together participants from previous sessions as well as other relevant, high-level stakeholders. The objective of this Roundtable, which capped the Southeast Asia Health Security Roundtable series, was to summarise, discuss and debate the findings and key insights from prior Roundtables in order to develop consensus recommendations for future pandemic preparedness in the region.

## Agenda and Participants

The Virtual Roundtable took place on 27 September 2024 between 2 PM and 5 PM (GMT+8). The full agenda and list of participants are provided in Appendices I and II respectively. The Zoom was organised by the teams from the Asia Centre for Health Security and Global Health Office at SSHSPH, while moderators were from the three organizing institutions (SSHSPH, UNPAD and HITAP).

## Presentations

### Keynote Speeches

The Roundtable was kicked off by keynote presentations from two distinguished leaders in global health: Prof Vernon Lee, Executive Director of the Interim Communicable Diseases Agency in Singapore, and Dr Lucas de Toca, Australia's Ambassador for Global Health. Prof Lee updated participants regarding the future Communicable Diseases Agency in Singapore and outlined the concept of a modular "Lego bricks" strategy for tackling future outbreaks. Dr de Toca articulated Australia's commitment to strengthening regional pandemic preparedness through collaborative capacity development. Both speakers emphasized the vital importance of regional and international collaboration in dealing with pandemics and global health crises.

### Summaries of Past Roundtables

The key points and recommendations of the Roundtables in Jakarta, Bangkok and Singapore were presented by Prof Auliya Suwantika (UNPAD), Mr Manit Sittimart and Prof Hsu Li Yang (SSHSPH) respectively. These points and recommendations have been covered in previous Roundtable reports and will not be detailed here.

## Breakout Discussions and Final Discussion

The participants were posted to three separate virtual breakout rooms to discuss each theme, with instructions to attempt to reach a consensus regarding the key insights and recommendations – including any new insights/recommendations to be included or existing insights/recommendations to be edited or removed. The conclusions from each breakout discussion were presented at the final plenary session for comments and consensus, and the final recommendations are listed below.

### Breakout Room 1 – Economic Impact & Response

The following recommendations were reached, largely flowing from the findings of the first Roundtable in Jakarta.

At the country level, countries should attempt to establish **financial reserves** for immediate mobilization during crises. Socioeconomic support for **vulnerable populations** is also essential, including targeted measures to aid disadvantaged groups and businesses both during and after pandemics. Strengthening the **labour market** and investing in **digital infrastructure** will also improve resilience. Developing robust **supply chain systems** with diversified sources for medical supplies, food, and essentials is critical to ensure stability in future crises. Additionally, advancing **public health data infrastructure** through digital transformation will facilitate seamless data exchange and integration, while a strengthened **primary healthcare system** can sustain healthcare delivery during emergencies.

At the regional level, **collaborative supply chain mechanisms** – with examples being joint purchasing and potential vaccine development capabilities – are vital, supported by regional funding. Establishing a **data-sharing platform** and harmonizing **regulatory standards and processes** will strengthen cross-border cooperation and enhance collective crisis response. These steps will ensure a more resilient and prepared global response to future pandemics.

### Breakout Room 2 – Health System Resilience

It was a clear consensus that strengthening health systems in general is crucial for mitigating pandemics and major epidemics. The following recommendations were reached, largely building on the findings of the second Roundtable in Bangkok.

Countries should enhance **health intelligence and surveillance systems** through integrated data platforms to enable informed decision-making. **Multi-sector collaboration**, including

public-private partnerships, can optimize resource utilization and response coordination. Dedicated funding and resources for **innovation and research** will drive advancements in healthcare capabilities. Expanding **universal health coverage** and reinforcing **primary healthcare** ensure equitable access and maintain public trust, particularly during crises.

At the regional level, **long-term joint capacity development** can leverage diversity across nations, fostering mutual learning and knowledge transfer. Establishing **regional research hubs**, encompassing clinical trial networks, laboratory collaborations, and sociobehavioral research, will support context-specific solutions. Additionally, regional mechanisms for **medical supplies and logistics**, including reserves and countermeasures, will enhance collective preparedness and response, ensuring an effective and unified approach to health emergencies. These measures are essential for building robust and adaptable health systems globally.

## Breakout Room 3 – Leadership & Communication during Health Crises

Effective leadership and communication are critical during health crises. At the country level, **adaptive crisis leadership** both in practice and also for training should be adopted, emphasizing collective and cohesive decision-making grounded in scientific evidence, even amidst uncertainty and trade-offs. Pre-crisis, building strong relationships with key stakeholders is essential. Post-crisis, **institutionalizing after-action reviews**, training, and case studies can foster continuous learning. Clear and trustworthy **communication strategies** are vital to empower people, including tailoring messages to target populations and training the public health workforce in crisis communication. Rapid monitoring and countering of misinformation must also be prioritized.

Regionally, platforms for **exchange and training** in health crisis preparation and response should be developed. Joint collaborations, such as exchanges between military medicine and health cluster groups within ASEAN, can enhance pandemic preparedness. A robust mechanism for **cross-border and regional misinformation countermeasures** will support unified and effective communication strategies during crises, strengthening trust and collaboration across borders.

## Conclusion

The Roundtable participants proposed and debated options for follow-up from the Roundtable series. All were of the view that such fora for sharing, networking and discussion were beneficial and should be continued. The recommendations from the Roundtable should also be shared more widely to policymakers in ASEAN countries, including at upcoming ASEAN Health Cluster 2 meetings, and perhaps also as a report in an academic journal.

## Postscript

The recommendations of the Roundtable series were presented by Dr Soawapak Hinjoy – one of the virtual Roundtable participants and Director of the Office of International Cooperation, Department of Disease Control at the Ministry of Public Health of Thailand – at the 9<sup>th</sup> Meeting of ASEAN Health Cluster 2 on Responding to All Hazards and Emerging Threats held on 29-13 October 2024 in Chonburi, Thailand.

## Annexes

### I. Full Agenda of the Virtual Roundtable

Time	Topic	Speaker/Facilitator
14:00	Welcome & Introduction <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Objectives &amp; Agenda</li> </ul>	Prof Hsu Li Yang (NUS)
14:10	Keynote Address I	Prof Vernon Lee (Executive Director, iCDA)
14:25	Keynote Address II	Dr Lucas de Toca (Ambassador for Global Health, Australia)
14:40	<u>Key Points and Recommendations:</u> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Economic impact &amp; response</li> <li>Health systems</li> <li>Crisis leadership &amp; communications</li> </ul>	Prof Auliya Suwantika (UNPAD) Mr Manit Sittimart (HITAP) Prof Hsu Li Yang (NUS)
15:05	<u>Breakout Sessions (45 mins):</u> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Economic preparations &amp; resilience</li> <li>Health systems response</li> <li>Leadership &amp; communications</li> </ul>	Moderators: UNPAD Moderators: HITAP Moderators: NUS
15:55	Group Presentations	All moderators
16:15	Final Discussion	Facilitator: Prof Hsu Li Yang (NUS)
16:45	Summary & Next Steps	Prof Hsu Li Yang (NUS)
16:50	Closing Remarks	Prof Auliya Suwantika (UNPAD) Mr Manit Sittimart (HITAP) Prof Hsu Li Yang (NUS)



## II. List of Participants

### Participants

No	Country	Name	Organisation	Designation	Breakout Sessions
1	Brunei	Ms Azzyati Filzah Haji Jamain	Ministry of Health	Acting Chief Executive Officer, Department of Policy and Planning	Health Systems Response
2	Brunei	Mr Roslee Baha	Universiti Brunei Darussalam	Lecturer, School of Business and Economics	Economic Preparations & Resilience
3	Cambodia	Mr Chandra Kusuma	G20 Joint Finance and Health Task Force (JFHTF) Secretariat	Senior Policy Analyst	-
4	Cambodia	Prof Chhea Chhorvann	National Institute of Public Health	Director and Dean, School of Public Health	-
5	Cambodia	Dr Teng Srey	Ministry of Health	Deputy Director, Communicable Disease Control Department	-
6	Cambodia	Prof Vonthanak Saphonn	University of Health Sciences	Rector	Economic Preparations & Resilience
7	Indonesia	Mr Abrian Duta Firmansyah	Ministry of Finance	Policy Analyst, Fiscal Policy Agency	-
8	Indonesia	Dr Bony Wiem Lestari	Universitas Padjadjaran	Senior Researcher, Department of Public Health, Faculty of Medicine	-
9	Indonesia	Dr Neily Zakiyah	Universitas Padjadjaran	Assistant Professor, Faculty of Pharmacy	-
10	Malaysia	Dr Asrul Akmal Shafie	Universiti Sains Malaysia	Lecturer, Faculty of Pharmacy	-
11	Malaysia	Dr Chong Chee Kheong	ASEAN Health Cluster 2	Senior Health Advisor	Leadership & Communications
12	Malaysia	BG Dr Mohd Arshil bin Moideen	University of Malaysia	Brigadier General and Dean, Faculty of Medicine and Defence Health	Leadership & Communications
13	Malaysia	Dr Mohd Ihsani Bin Mahmood	Ministry of Health	Senior Principal Assistant Director, Disease Surveillance Sector	-
14	Malaysia	Dr Tan Seok Hong	Ministry of Health	Public Health Medicine Specialist, Disaster, Outbreak, Crisis and Emergency Management (DOCE) Sector	Health Systems Response
15	Singapore	Ms Adeliza Binte Abdul Mutalib	Singapore Armed Forces	Head, Biodefence Centre, Force Health Group	Leadership & Communications
16	Singapore	LTC Dr Goh Jit Khong Jake	Singapore Armed Forces	Head, Force Health Group	Leadership & Communications

17	Singapore	Adjunct Prof Derrick Heng	Ministry of Health	Deputy Director-General of Health (Public Health)	-
18	Singapore	Dr Premikha	Ministry of Defence	Preventive Medicine Resident	Economic Preparations & Resilience
19	Singapore	Dr Tan Yoke Cheng	Interim Communicable Diseases Agency	Head, Preparedness and Readiness	-
20	Singapore	A/Prof Shawn Vasoo	National Centre for Infectious Diseases	Clinical Director and Head, Infectious Disease Research Laboratory	-
21	Thailand	Dr Aungsumalee Pholpark	Mahidol University	Lecturer, Faculty of Social Sciences and Humanities	Economic Preparations & Resilience
22	Thailand	Lapad Pongcharoenyong	The Health Intervention and Technology Assessment Program (HITAP), Ministry of Public Health	Research Development Strategist	-
23	Thailand	Dr Nyein Chan Oo	Thailand National Health Foundation (NHF)	Researcher, Global Health Initiates	-
24	Thailand	Dr Piya Hanvoravongchai	Thai National Health Foundation (NHF)	Secretary General	Health Systems Response
25	Thailand	Dr Soawapak Hinjoy	Ministry of Public Health	Director, Office of International Cooperation, Department of Disease Control	Leadership & Communications
26	Thailand	Dr Somsak Akksilp	Ministry of Public Health	Advisor to the Office of the Permanent Secretary on Global Health	Health Systems Response
27	The Philippines	Prof Kenneth Hartigan-Go	Ateneo School of Government	Senior Research Fellow, Health Governance Program of the Ateneo Policy Center	Leadership & Communications
28	The Philippines	Ms Richelle P. Abellera	Department of Health	Nurse V, Epidemiology Bureau	-
29	The Philippines	Dr Alethea de Guzman	Department of Health	Director IV, Epidemiology Bureau, Public Health Services Team	-
30	The Philippines	Ms Aina Beatrice Basilio	Department of Health	Senior Health Program Officer, Epidemiology Bureau	Economic Preparations & Resilience
31	Timor-Leste	Dr Frederico Bosco Alves dos Santos	Ministry of Health	General Director of Technical-Scientific, National Institute of Public Health	Economic Preparations & Resilience

## Resource Personnel

No	Country	Name	Organisation	Designation	Breakout Sessions
1	Others	Mr Les Ong	United Nations Development Programme (UNDP)	Programme Specialist, Access and Delivery Partnership, HIV and Health Group	-
2	Others	Ms Inthira Suya	United Nations Development Programme (UNDP)	Research and M&E Specialist	Health Systems Response

## Observers

No	Country	Name	Organisation	Designation	Breakout Sessions
1	Indonesia	Yasmin Fatinah	Universitas Padjadjaran (UNPAD)	Student, Department of Pharmacology and Clinical Pharmacy, Faculty of Pharmacy	Economic Preparations & Resilience
2	Australia	Mr Jonathon Darby	Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade (DFAT), Australia	Assistant Director, Global Health Division	-

## Keynote Speakers

No	Country	Name	Organisation	Designation	Breakout Sessions
1	Australia	Dr Lucas de Toca	Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade (DFAT), Australia	Ambassador for Global Health	-
2	Singapore	Prof Vernon Lee	Ministry of Health, Singapore	Executive Director, Communicable Diseases Agency (CDA)	-

## Faculty

No	Country	Name	Organisation	Designation	Breakout Sessions
1	Indonesia	Prof Auliya Suwantika	Universitas Padjadjaran (UNPAD)	Vice Dean for Resources and Organisation, Department of Pharmacology and Clinical Pharmacy	Economic Preparations & Resilience
2	Indonesia	Dr Fredrick Dermawan Purba	Universitas Padjadjaran (UNPAD)	Vice Dean of Academic, Student Affairs, and Research, Faculty of Psychology	Economic Preparations & Resilience
3	Singapore	Prof Hsu Li Yang	National University of Singapore	Vice Dean of Global Health and Director of Asia Centre for Health Security	Leadership & Communications
4	Thailand	Mr Manit Sittimart	Health Intervention and Technology Assessment Program (HITAP), Ministry of Public Health	Senior Associate, International Unit	Health Systems Response
5	Thailand	Ms Saudamini Dabak	Health Intervention and Technology Assessment Program (HITAP), , Ministry of Public Health	Head, International Unit	Health Systems Response