



## Access to Medicine Index Report 2024

**For Prelims:** [Malaria](#), [Tuberculosis](#), [Tropical Diseases](#), [Non-Communicable Diseases](#), [Vaccines](#), [Maternal Health](#), [Supply Chains](#), [Natural Disasters](#), [African Union](#), [Public-Private Partnerships](#), [Digital Health](#), [R&D Efforts](#).

**For Mains:** Significance of Availability of Medicines, Vaccines and Healthcare Services for Poors and Low- and Middle-Income Countries.

[Source: DTE](#)

### Why in News?

Recently, the **Access to Medicine Foundation** released its **2024 Index Report**, evaluating pharmaceutical companies' efforts to enhance medicine access in [low and middle-income countries](#) (LMICs) despite ongoing challenges.

### What are the Highlights of the Access to Medicine Index Report 2024?

- **Exclusion from Clinical Trials:** LMICs, despite being home to **80%** of the global population, account for only **43%** of all clinical trials conducted worldwide.
  - This limits the participation of LMIC populations in the development of new medicines and delays their access to innovative treatments.
- **Limited Tech Transfers & Medicine Access:** Voluntary licensing and technology transfers are concentrated in countries like **Brazil, China, and India**, leaving much of **sub-Saharan Africa** excluded, which limits the availability of medicines in many low-income regions.
- **Gaps in Access for Low-Income Countries:** While some companies are adopting inclusive business models, over **61%** of products assessed lack specific strategies for low-income countries.
  - This underscores persistent inequities, as access efforts remain concentrated in upper-middle-income regions.
- **Decline in R&D for Priority Diseases:** Pharmaceutical companies are increasingly moving away from R&D for priority diseases such as [malaria](#), [tuberculosis](#), and neglected [tropical diseases](#), which disproportionately affect LMICs.
  - The report highlighted the urgent need for **pharmaceutical companies** to enhance **efforts** and create **transparent strategies** for **equitable access to medicines**.

### What are the Needs and Challenges in Accessing Medicines in LMICs?

- **The Need for Improved Access to Medicines:**
  - LMICs face a dual burden of infectious and [non-communicable diseases](#) (NCDs) that strain fragile healthcare systems, according to [WHO](#) with **17 million** people dying from NCDs before age 70 annually, **86%** of these deaths occurring in LMICs.
    - Affordable, **high-quality medicines**, **diagnostics**, and [vaccines](#) are essential to

address these challenges and reduce preventable mortality.

- Moreover, strengthening **local pharmaceutical** manufacturing and distribution networks is critical to reliable supply of essential medicines and reduce dependence on imports in LMIC.
- **Challenges in Providing Medicines in LMICs:**
  - **Economic Barriers:** Access to **medicines** in low and middle-income countries (LMICs) is severely limited by **economic barriers**.
    - Notably the **high cost** of essential medications, including **patented drugs**, significantly restricts access for patients and healthcare systems with **limited purchasing power**.
  - **Financial Consequences:** **Out-of-pocket healthcare expenditures** force families to make devastating choices between necessary medications and other basic needs, often resulting in **catastrophic financial consequences** that exacerbate **health inequalities**.
  - **Infrastructure Challenges:** Inadequate **transportation infrastructure**, including poorly maintained roads and insufficient **cold chain facilities**.
    - This hampers the efficient distribution of medicines, particularly in **rural areas**, while unreliable electricity compromises the integrity of **temperature-sensitive medications**.
    - Disruptions in **supply chains**, particularly during pandemics or **natural disasters**, exacerbate medicine shortages in LMICs.
  - **Regulatory Issues:** **Weak regulatory frameworks** contribute to the proliferation of **substandard** and **counterfeit medicines**, undermining treatment **efficacy** and **safety**, as insufficient enforcement capabilities fail to uphold **pharmaceutical quality standards**.
    - **Pharmaceutical innovation** often focuses on diseases prevalent in **high-income countries**, leaving LMIC-specific health challenges, such as **maternal health** and childhood illnesses, largely unaddressed.
  - **Workforce Limitations:** A shortage of trained **healthcare professionals** further restricts appropriate **prescription** and **medication management**, particularly in rural settings.
    - Also, low **health literacy** and **cultural beliefs** hinder adherence to prescribed treatments, complicating efforts to ensure **equitable access** to essential medicines in LMICs.

## UHC 2030 Goals

- **Universal Health Coverage (UHC) 2030** aims to provide essential health services without financial hardship, promoting equitable access and strengthened health systems worldwide.
- UHC 2030, co-hosted by **WHO, the World Bank, and OECD**, mobilises stakeholders to advance UHC through political commitment and accountability efforts.

## Way Forward

- **Strengthening Local Manufacturing:** Establishing regional pharmaceutical production hubs will **reduce dependency** on imports and ensure a stable supply of medicines.
  - For instance, the **African Union's** initiative to produce **60%** of the **continent's vaccine** needs by **2040** is a model for fostering self-sufficiency.
- **Investing in R&D for LMIC Needs:** **Public-private partnerships** like **Medicines Patent Pool collaboration**, should focus on priority diseases like malaria, tuberculosis, and neglected tropical diseases.
  - These collaborations must prioritise affordable, **region-specific solutions** to address the unique health challenges of LMICs.
- **Expanding Digital Healthcare:** **Digital health** technologies and **AI-driven tools** can revolutionise healthcare delivery in LMICs by improving **disease surveillance**, **enhancing diagnostics**, and enabling **access to remote healthcare services**.

- For example, technology driven initiatives like **telemedicine** and **consultation platforms** can facilitate remote healthcare access, and platforms like India's **U-Win** (Portal for Universal Immunisation) and **Co-Win** (Portal for Covid-19 Vaccination Management) platforms provide vaccinations and healthcare coordination.
- **Streamlining Regulatory Processes:** Establishing harmonised **regulatory frameworks** will accelerate medicine approvals and facilitate the rapid deployment of life-saving treatments.
  - Prevent **patent evergreening**, encourage local **generic production** in LMICs, and enable mutual recognition of approvals with countries that have higher standards.
- **Expanding Financing Mechanisms:** International collaborations should focus on creating pooled **procurement models** and increasing funding to make medicines more affordable and accessible.
- **Addressing Gender Disparities:** Expanding **R&D efforts** to include women and transgender's health and prioritising policies that address **gender-based barriers** in healthcare access are crucial to improving overall health equity in LMICs.

**Drishti Mains Question:**

What key challenges do low- and middle-income countries face in accessing affordable medicines and vaccines, and how has India responded?

**UPSC Civil Services Examination, Previous Year Question (PYQ)**

**Prelims:**

**Q. What is the importance of using Pneumococcal Conjugate Vaccines in India? (2020)**

1. These vaccines are effective against pneumonia as well as meningitis and sepsis.
2. Dependence on antibiotics that are not effective against drug-resistant bacteria can be reduced.
3. These vaccines have no side effects and cause no allergic reactions.

**Select the correct answer using the code given below:**

- (a) 1 only
- (b) 1 and 2 only
- (c) 3 only
- (d) 1, 2 and 3

**Ans: (b)**

**Mains:**

**Q. How is the Government of India protecting traditional knowledge of medicine from patenting by pharmaceutical companies? (2019)**