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Vietnam’s healthcare landscape is changing. The country’s strong economic growth and population growth is creating a new middle class which is demanding higher-quality medical treatment. These affluent, digitally-literate consumers are spending more on their healthcare, leading to a rise in demand for private providers and digital health services.

The population of Vietnam is not just becoming richer. It is also growing older. This is resulting in a shift in the burden of disease from communicable to non-communicable conditions like diabetes and cancer. These non-communicable conditions require coordinated, long-term care solutions.

Meanwhile, Vietnam is embracing the Fourth Industrial Revolution. Internet access is widespread and the country has seen rapid development in 4G and 5G mobile communication technologies. Building on these foundations, the government of Vietnam is driving a digitalisation agenda in hospitals and clinics across the country. Smart solutions are being strongly encouraged that utilise big data, artificial intelligence (AI), cloud computing and mobile technology to help alleviate Vietnam’s overcrowded public hospitals and increase quality of care.

KEY DRIVERS

Steady economic growth and a growing population

There are three key drivers for healthcare spending in Vietnam: strong economic growth, a rising population, and a booming middle class. Over the past two decades, Vietnam has seen an average annual GDP growth rate of 6.4 per cent. This has made it one of the fastest-growing economies in the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN). Meanwhile, Vietnam’s population is set to rise from 95 million in 2019 to 103 million in 2025. Today, Vietnam is benefiting from a demographic dividend, as 70 percent of the population is of working-age (18–65 years old). The country has a ‘golden’ population ratio with just one dependent for every two people in work.

Rising disposable income and a rapidly expanding middle class

The World Bank awarded Vietnam ‘middle-income’ status in 2010, and today, the country is the sixth largest economy in ASEAN’s 10-member trading bloc. Over the forward period, Vietnam will see a huge increase in its middle class. In 2015, roughly 10 per cent of the Vietnamese population were part of the global middle class. By 2035, this is projected to increase to over half of Vietnam’s population. This growth in disposable income will, in turn, lead to a rise in spending on private healthcare. Private healthcare expenditure is forecast to rise from US$6.7 billion in 2016 to US$9.7 billion in 2021. Already, this growing, affluent group is spending more on healthcare services and demanding higher-quality medical treatment.
Increasing healthcare expenditure

Developing healthcare is one of Vietnam’s top priorities, and healthcare spending is set to rise from US$15.6 billion in 2018 to US$42.9 billion in 2028. This equates to a 10-year compound annual growth rate (CAGR) of 11 per cent. Healthcare expenditure was 6.5 per cent of GDP in 2018 – among the highest in ASEAN. Meanwhile, per capita spending on healthcare is expected to triple from US$191 in 2018 to US$408 in 2028.1

HEALTHCARE EXPENDITURE

Vietnam healthcare expenditure forecast (US$bn)

![Vietnam healthcare expenditure forecast chart](image)

Vietnam healthcare expenditure: 2011-2016

![Vietnam healthcare expenditure 2011-2016 chart](image)


KEY TRENDS

The increasing burden of chronic disease in Vietnam

The nature of ill health in Vietnam is changing. In terms of health spending, the country is experiencing a shift from communicable to non-communicable diseases. Diabetes, cancer and cardiovascular conditions – among others – are becoming more common. According to the World Bank, non-communicable diseases accounted for 77 per cent of deaths in 2016, up from 68 per cent in 2010, and continue to climb. This has created a greater need for long-term, coordinated healthcare services specifically catering to these chronic diseases.

An emerging ageing population

Vietnam is often considered a ‘young’ country. Thanks to a falling population growth rate, however, that landscape will change rapidly over coming decades. Vietnam’s median age is predicted to hit 42.1 in 2050, up from 30.4 in 2017. Meanwhile, the proportion of the population aged over 65 is set to triple from 7 per cent in 2015 to 21 per cent in 2050.7 UNESCO has identified Vietnam as one of the world’s fastest-ageing societies. This trend will increase both the burden on healthcare facilities and the demand for services to care for older people. Centres which can provide such care have been built in major cities including Hanoi, Ho Chi Minh City and Hue.
Digitalisation of healthcare: digital health enablers in Vietnam

Vietnam is well positioned to adopt digital health solutions. More than 60 per cent of Vietnamese are aged under 54 years old. And this young population is rapidly embracing new communication technologies. The number of people using Facebook in Vietnam hit 37 million in 2017. This is set to rise to 44 million in 2020, giving Vietnam the seventh highest number of Facebook users in the world – a good proxy for Vietnam’s adoption of online communications.

On average, Vietnamese spend seven hours a day online, with three of these on mobile devices. Indeed, the country has high rates of penetration for both mobile phones (130 per cent) and smartphones (40 per cent), with both segments continuing to grow rapidly.

Vietnam’s Government has issued policies to build up the country’s Information and Communication Technology (ICT) infrastructure and to support the development of ICT services. As a result, internet access is widespread, with a penetration rate of 67 per cent and an annual growth rate of 28 per cent. This is among the highest in the region.

In addition, Vietnam has seen rapid development in mobile communications technologies, with 4G networks now covering over 95 per cent of households. On current forecasts, 5G networks are set to follow in 2020, bringing with them the potential to enable further digital transformation.

The country’s technology infrastructure is also moving towards cloud-based services, creating opportunities to develop innovative and cost-effective solutions to deliver healthcare services. Together, these enablers provide a good foundation for integrated healthcare services in Vietnam.

Challenges, however, remain. One is the cost and complexity of implementing digital health information systems such as hospital information systems (HIS) and electronic medical records (EMR). A second is the preference of doctors and other healthcare professionals for using old-fashioned paper documentation. As with any market, the digitalisation of data and services also gives rise to issues of privacy and customer trust.

—in Hootsuite, 2018

60% of Vietnam’s population is aged between 25 and 54

07 hours the average time Vietnamese spend online each day

130% mobile phone subscription rate, which is growing rapidly

40% smartphone penetration rate, and smartphone ownership is rising rapidly

67% internet penetration rate, with an annual growth rate of 28%

95% households covered by 4G networks, with 5G pilots now underway

Challenges

There remain some challenges to digital health solution adoption in Vietnam, including the cost and complexity of implementation of certain systems such as HIS and EMR, and the existing habits of doctors and healthcare professionals in using paper documentation.
Government support for digitalisation in healthcare services

Vietnam’s Ministry of Health (MOH) is driving a national agenda for the digitalisation of healthcare, encouraging the adoption of digital health solutions in all hospitals across the country. Projects and initiatives include:

**Health information management systems:** MOH’s E-health Administration is working with various organisations, including social and health insurance agencies, to facilitate the coordination and implementation of healthcare digitalisation. MOH recently issued circular 54/2017/TT-BYT on the assessment criteria for information technology applications at healthcare facilities across Vietnam. It is also working on a plan to develop smart healthcare systems (such as electronic health and medical records, and commune health station-management systems), e-government initiatives including e-transactions, e-verification and online public services, and smart medicine management systems.

**The application of advanced technology in medical examination and treatment:** MOH recently issued Circular 47/2017 regulating telemedicine in Vietnam. This circular, in effect since February 2018, allows doctors to offer telemedicine services to patients, subject to certain requirements including IT infrastructure and license. Circular 47 provides guidelines for a range of telemedicine activities such as telemedicine consultation, teleradiology consultation, remote surgery consultation and telemedicine technology transfer training. More broadly, MOH is encouraging the use of advanced technologies such as big data, analytics and artificial intelligence (AI) in healthcare.

In 2017, MOH also set out national goals for the protection, care and improvement of public health in Resolution 20-NQ/TW. Key priority areas include:

**Improving public health:** The Vietnamese Government launched its ‘Vietnam Health Programme’ in 2019. It set out tasks to achieve 28 targets across 10 priority health fields. These priorities include proper nutrition, physical exercise, healthcare for children and students, prevention of harm caused by cigarettes and alcohol, environmental sanitation, food safety, early detection and the management of non-communicable diseases. They also include the care and management of people’s health, health of the elderly, and workers’ health.

**Improving the healthcare network:** MOH’s top priority is to optimise Vietnam’s healthcare network and to ease the burden on large, national-level hospitals. There is strong support for improving existing hospitals and creating new, private hospitals. For example, Vietnam aims to increase the proportion of private-sector hospital beds to 10 per cent by 2025. The domestic private healthcare industry may position itself to service the high-end segment of the healthcare market, tapping into the high spending of health tourists. Every year, it is estimated that US$1 billion is spent by over 4,000 middle class Vietnamese patients travelling abroad for healthcare services.

**Improving healthcare access and service quality:** Vietnam is aiming to improve the accessibility and quality of its healthcare services. This is particularly needed in poor, rural, border and island areas and at the grassroots, primary care level. The country has set a number of targets to achieve this. Specifically, by 2025, 95 per cent of commune health stations should be able to deliver preventative care, and manage and treat selected non-communicable diseases. By this date, Vietnam also aims to have 95 per cent universal healthcare access, and have reached the target of 30 hospital beds, 10 doctors, 2.8 pharmacists (with university degrees) and 25 nurses per 10,000 people.

**Promoting the development of the pharmaceutical and medical equipment sectors:** MOH aims to strengthen regulations for pharmaceuticals, vaccines and medical products. In doing so, it hopes to ensure better access to essential medicines and health technologies.

**Developing human resources and medical science and technology:** Priorities include enhancing the training, professional qualifications and ethics of health workers as well as capacity building in medical, pharmaceutical, biomedical science and technology research.
PATIENT PAIN POINTS: INCREASING DEMAND

Access to care: Patients in Vietnam face a number of challenges in accessing healthcare services. Making an appointment and choosing a doctor at public hospitals can be confusing, and waiting times can be long. In certain areas – especially in rural care – there is a lack of qualified, trained and experienced healthcare professionals.

Quality of care: Patients often do not have much time with their doctor. Consultation times can last just a few minutes and doctors may not have access to patients’ medical records. There is also a significant variation in standards of care and the quality of medical equipment between national and provincial hospitals. This means patients often travel long distances to overcrowded, national-level hospitals rather than visit their local or provincial hospital.

Patient experience: Overcrowding and high-occupancy rates are serious problems in Vietnam’s public hospitals. This is particularly acute in large cities. Bed occupancy rates are well above the World Health Organisation’s recommendation of 80 per cent. The average patient in Vietnam experiences long waiting times, short consultations with medical professionals, and multiple visits to doctors and specialists.
VIETNAM’S HEALTHCARE SYSTEM

MOH is responsible for healthcare in Vietnam. It manages a large number of public hospitals, research institutes, universities and colleges. Other Government agencies, such as the Ministries of Labour, Invalids & Social Affairs, Transportation and Defence, also run a number of Vietnam’s hospitals and clinics.

Vietnam’s public healthcare system is organised into four levels: central, provincial, district and communal. Central and provincial-level hospitals usually consist of general and specialised hospitals and medical centres. District health centres and commune health stations offer primary care alongside some medical and preventative services.

Vietnam’s private healthcare sector is growing. The number of private hospitals has increased from 133 in 2011 to 231 in 2016, a CAGR of 12 per cent.

Public hospitals

Public hospitals in Vietnam are overcrowded and their services are oversubscribed. Therefore, digital solutions have the potential to reduce hospitalisation rates. They also open up opportunities to provide care to an ageing and diverse population, particularly in remote or rural areas. Digital solutions can further help national-level or specialist hospitals to deliver training, or to conduct examination and treatment activities with satellite or lower-level hospitals.

Vietnam’s key public hospitals include:

Bach Mai Hospital

Founded in 1911, Bach Mai Hospital is a leading comprehensive general hospital with spacious facilities, modern equipment and qualified staff, including some of Vietnam’s leading physicians. Under the management of MOH – and with strong international relationships – the hospital provides high-quality medical services, conducts training and scientific research, and provides guidance to lower-level hospitals. Bach Mai Hospital has more than 3,000 beds, three institutes, eight centres, 22 clinical departments, six para-clinical departments, 11 functional departments and a nursing college.

National Geriatric Hospital

Established in 1983, the National Geriatric Hospital is the first national hospital for elderly people in Vietnam. It is the top specialist hospital in Vietnam providing medical examination and treatment to older people. It has over 100 doctors and 200 nurses, with more than 300 patient beds. The hospital is renowned within Vietnam for its international linkages and collaborative research.

Private hospitals

There is growing demand for more accessible, higher-quality healthcare. This demand is expected to drive more affluent people in Vietnam toward private healthcare providers. The country’s growing middle class is also becoming more discerning about their own health and their experience when receiving medical treatment. This is leading private hospitals to innovate in areas such as mobile health and digital services.

In doing so, they hope to attract customers who want to save time and receive better customer service.

Vietnam’s key private hospitals include:

Vinmec Healthcare System

Vietnam’s leading private conglomerate, Vingroup, has ambitious aims to raise the standard of healthcare in the country. In 2012, Vingroup launched the Vinmec Healthcare System to achieve this goal. As of 2018, Vinmec had seven hospitals providing premium healthcare services, with three more hospitals expected to be operational by 2020. Patient satisfaction rates with Vinmec are over 90 per cent, and patient numbers are rising between 30–50 per cent a year.

Hoan My Medical Corporation

Hoan My Medical Corporation is one of Vietnam’s leading and largest private healthcare networks. It includes more than 2,500 operating beds, and has a capacity of over 3,400 beds. Hoan My has 20 hospitals and clinics with six hospital development projects in the pipeline. Over its 20-year history, Hoan My has built a strong brand with a reputation for delivering affordable and quality healthcare. The network employs over 800 doctors and 4,000 staff, and serves over 3.7 million patients every year.14 Hoan My was acquired by the Clermont Group, a Singapore-based international business group, in 2013.

HEALTHCARE STATISTICS IN VIETNAM

Number of hospitals in Vietnam 2011-2016

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Public hospitals</th>
<th>Private hospitals</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2011</td>
<td>1,040</td>
<td>133</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2012</td>
<td>1,042</td>
<td>150</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2013</td>
<td>1,069</td>
<td>167</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2014</td>
<td>1,063</td>
<td>186</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2015</td>
<td>1,071</td>
<td>207</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2016</td>
<td>1,091</td>
<td>231</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

No. per 10,000 population

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Hospital beds</th>
<th>Nurses</th>
<th>Physicians</th>
<th>Dentist</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>28</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>08</td>
<td>01</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Healthcare expenditure in 2016

- Total healthcare expenditure: US$13.2 bn
  - Public: 50.9%
  - Private: 49.9%

A number of organisations are delivering solutions in the digital healthcare space in Vietnam. These organisations range from ICT services and solutions companies to medical device distributors, and from startups to established companies. Over the past few years, Vietnam has seen a growing number of health startups who aim to use high-technology solutions to improve the quality of medical services.

LOCAL COMPANIES

FPT Information System

Established in 1994, FPT Information System (FPT IS) is one of the leading system-integrators in Vietnam and the region. FPT IS offers solutions for industries including the public sector, banking & finance, telecommunications, healthcare, transport and utilities. FPT IS is a member of FPT Corporation, which is the largest ICT company in the private sector in Vietnam. It has more than 32,000 employees, including 13,695 technology experts, engineers and developers. The company operates in 33 countries around the world. FPT’s e-Hospital software suite has been used by more than 200 hospitals in Vietnam. These include top-tier national hospitals such as Bach Mai, Cho Ray, Dong Nai General Hospital and others belonging to MOH including the National Children’s Hospital, Thanh Hoa Children’s Hospital and Ha Tinh General Hospital. FPT recently signed a memorandum of understanding with Children’s Hospital and Ha Tinh General Hospital. FPT is one of the leading system-integrators in Vietnam and national hospitals. The company aims to develop an interconnected digital ecosystem.

FPT Information System

FPT Information System is the leading subsidiary of the Vietnam Posts and Telecommunications Group (VNPT). This is a state-owned limited liability company that sells, imports and exports post, telecommunications, multimedia and other digital products and services. VNPT Information Technology undertakes research and development in software solutions, and provides products and services for national organisations, ministries and enterprises. VNPT launched VNPT-Information Technology in 2016, employing thousands of IT engineers with a focus on developing state-of-the-art technologies such as AI, big data and blockchain.

VNPT Information System

State-owned Viettel (Viettel Telecom Corporation, which is one of the largest providers of mobile services in Vietnam) launched Viettel Business Solutions Corporation in 2018. The corporation implements projects and provides ICT solutions to government ministries and departments, localities, businesses and organisations – both domestic and international. Viettel Business Solutions works in a range of sectors, including e-Government, smart healthcare, education, smart transportation, smart energy and smart cities.

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Viettel’s Core Technology Center is the first unit to implement blockchain solutions to the management of citizens’ health records nationwide. Vietnam’s Minister of Information and Communications granted Viettel permission to pilot 5G mobile technology for one year. In 2018, the company undertook training and research on data centre operations and provided training on data centre operations and provided training on data centre operations. In 2018, Vietnam’s Minister of Information and Communications granted Viettel permission to pilot 5G mobile technology for one year.

Viettel Business Solutions

In 2017, IBM and Viettel announced a partnership to implement IBM Watson for Oncology – the first AI-driven oncology clinical decision-support system to help doctors provide advanced cancer care for patients in Vietnam. MOH has selected three hospitals (HCMC Oncology Hospital, National X (Cancer) Hospital in Hanoi, and Phu Tho Province General Hospital) to pilot this system.

Recently, the Department of Information Technology, under MOH, announced the conclusions of the Board of Review regarding the use of this software in supporting counselling for cancer treatment in Vietnam. It found that there were similarities in the treatment given by doctors and IBM’s AI.

INFINITT Healthcare

Through a partnership with Vikiomed Company Limited, INFINITT has deployed its PACS software at several hospitals in Vietnam.

Jiohealth

Introduced to Vietnam in 2017, the startup provides on-demand access to healthcare services such as primary care, chronic disease management, pediatrics and ancillary care services. Through the Jiohealth app, patients can access healthcare advice and arrange an appointment with qualified doctors. On top of the online healthcare app, Jiohealth also has a physical facility in HCMC.

STARTUPS

CLAS Healthcare

Microsoft has teamed up with CLAS Healthcare, a Vietnamese partner, to provide smart medical services such as Basic24x7. The app, developed on the Microsoft Bot Framework, allows medical workers to give advice to patients online. The system also uses big data to help medical specialists give quick and accurate diagnoses.

After the successful launch of Microsoft Bot at the Hue Family Medicine Center, CLAS Healthcare is now launching the same service in Ho Chi Minh City and Hanoi.13

VieVie Healthcare

VieVie, which began operations in 2017, is a telemedicine and online patient engagement platform. VieVie has partnered with Hoan My Medical Corporation – one of Vietnam’s leading and largest private healthcare networks with 14 hospitals and six clinics – to integrate some of its online health services with the hospital group.

Homecares

Homecares is a mobile app that enables patients to book appointments with doctors and arrange for medical services to be delivered at their homes. It recently teamed up with Ikure, an Indian health technology company providing telemedicine technology equipment and services, and formed the IKMG Medical Alliance to provide services in Da Nang.

STARS

Digital Health

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MOH on the application and development of IT solutions for healthcare during 2018–2028.

MOH recently signed a memorandum of understanding with Children’s Hospital and Ha Tinh General Hospital. FPT Corporation, which is the largest ICT company in Vietnam, employs thousands of IT engineers with a focus on developing state-of-the-art technologies such as AI, big data and blockchain.

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Significant opportunities exist for Australian digital health companies to contribute to higher quality and more cost-effective healthcare in Vietnam.

One promising area is in telemedicine, where innovative services can help reduce overcrowding in public hospitals and provide healthcare access to an ageing, diverse and geographically dispersed population. Opportunities for telemedicine applications in Vietnam exist across a number of areas including remote patient diagnosis and prescriptions, remote patient monitoring and consultation, telemedicine in surgical care, and telecardiology.

Vietnam has also started to embrace the application of advanced technologies to enhance quality in preventative healthcare, medical diagnosis and treatment. Advanced technologies such as big data, analytics and AI have the potential to improve healthcare decision making through innovation such as clinical decision-support systems, predictive modelling and cognitive analytics. Robotics technology has also been sought out by selected hospitals in Vietnam.

Health information systems that help increase operational efficiencies and enable coordinated healthcare are needed in Vietnam. Quality and localised health information software and solutions such as picture archiving and communication systems (PACS), laboratory information systems (LIS), HIS and EMR are in shortage in Vietnam. Other emerging areas include:

- operational management systems such as clinic management software and energy management systems
- medicine management systems such as drug supply chain management and pharmacy management
- cybersecurity solutions.

Additionally, there are business opportunities in the creation and provision of technologies or applications that can improve the patient experience and access to care. Examples include digital patient services such as appointment booking, doctor selection and bill payment, and mobile health applications.
CONSIDERATIONS FOR MARKET ENTRY

There are a number of challenges for new market entrants. For instance, procurement processes in public hospitals can be complicated and time-consuming. Therefore, partnering with local IT service providers or medical device distributors can provide faster access to the Vietnamese market including its decision makers, distribution networks and end-user contacts. Local partners can also help to overcome language barriers, share working capital and draw on their expertise in local licensing procedures.

To succeed in the Vietnamese market, it is important to consider several important factors. These include:

- adapting to the local business culture
- finding the right local partners and staff
- ensuring the adaptability of products to the local market.

Companies should invest resources to raise awareness of digital solutions. This, in turn, will drive a change in consumer perception and behaviour. Companies should also invest time in understanding the healthcare sector in Vietnam, including its people, processes and technologies.

Cultural considerations are also important. Business relationships are formal in nature and can take time to develop. Meanwhile, meetings are an integral part of the business process. People often prefer to meet their prospective partners face-to-face. Other challenges in the market include bureaucratic procedures, unclear legislation and a lack of intellectual property rights enforcement.

To learn more about possible business opportunities for your products and services, get in touch with Austrade Vietnam. Our advisers can discuss market entry pathways and help you work out an action plan. We can also provide local market intelligence, assist you with your market entry strategy, and help you get started in this fast-growing market.

ABOUT AUSTRADE

The Australian Trade and Investment Commission – Austrade – contributes to Australia’s economic prosperity by helping Australian businesses, education institutions, tourism operators, governments and citizens as they:

- develop international markets
- win productive foreign direct investment
- promote international education
- strengthen Australia’s tourism industry
- seek consular and passport services.

Austrade helps companies around the world to identify and take up investment opportunities in Australia as well as to source Australian goods and services. Our assistance includes:

- providing insight on Australian capabilities
- identifying potential investment projects and strategic alliance partners
- helping you to identify and contact Australian suppliers

AUSTRADE VIETNAM

If you are interested in entering the Vietnam health market, please contact one of our International Health team members in Vietnam:

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