



PL 2

DEMOGRAPHIC SHIFTS AND HEALTH SYSTEM TRANSFORMATION

| BACKGROUND

Global demographic transitions—including aging populations and declining fertility rates, youth bulges, and complex migration patterns—pose significant challenges to health systems worldwide[1],[2]. These will result in structural changes with around 55 per cent of the world's population living in towns and cities, projected to be 70 per cent by 2050[2]. However, changing demographics will impact health systems if we do not prepare; for example, countries with the most increase in non-communicable diseases, are least prepared to address in terms of their health systems[3]. Investing in health systems will be critical to tackle these challenges[4]. Key issues on demographic transitions relate to changing disease burden, healthcare infrastructure and access, aging population and long-term care, workforce and economic impact, maternal and child health, health policy and financing and technological advancements. In addition, there is a need to think of a life course approach to health and well-being and how health systems can be designed for this purpose[5]. Overall, there is therefore a need for a holistic approach to adapt health systems to respond to the shifts in demographics.

[1] PMAC 2026 overarching concept note: 1. PMAC2026 Concept Note as of 24 Jan (1).pdf

[2] Shifting Demographics | United Nations

[3] The Changing Demographics of Global Health

[4] Global health 2035: a world converging within a generation - The Lancet

[5] The life-course approach: from theory to practice: case stories from two small countries in Europe

| OBJECTIVES

The objective of this plenary is to highlight the imperative for inclusive and sustainable health systems that are resilient to shifting demographics, recognising the need for multi-sectoral, life-course approaches in the context of current global developments, to improve population health and well-being.



Speaker / Speaker

Dechen Wangmo

Head

The PEMA Secretariat
Bhutan

Dasho Dechen Wangmo heads the PEMA Secretariat, Bhutan's national agency for mental health and child protection. She previously served as Bhutan's first female Minister for Health (2018–2023), leading major health reforms and the national COVID-19 response with distinction.

Before entering politics, Dasho Dechen worked as an international public health consultant, providing technical assistance on health systems strengthening, governance, and strategic planning across nine countries in the Southeast Asia region. She is the founder of the Bhutan Cancer Society and Lhaksam, Bhutan's network of people living with HIV, and has served as an Advisory Board Member of the Bhutan Foundation for nearly a decade.

Her contributions have been recognized with several national honors, including the Red Scarf in 2020, one of Bhutan's highest civilian distinctions and the National Order of Merit (Gold) in 2016 from His Majesty the King. Internationally, she has served as President of the 74th World Health Assembly (2021), Executive Board Member of WHO, Board Member of Gavi, the Vaccine Alliance, and Member of the Global Leaders Group on Antimicrobial Resistance.

Dasho Dechen holds a Master of Public Health (Global Health Epidemiology) from the Yale School of Public Health and a Bachelor's in Cardiopulmonary Science (Magna Cum Laude) from Northeastern University, USA. She was also honored with Yale's Distinguished Alumni Award.