



PMAC PRINCE MAHIDOL
AWARD CONFERENCE **2026**

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.



Moderator / Chair

Feng Zhao

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Feng Zhao brings 30 years of experience in public health, medicine, economics, and demography across the globe. Currently, he oversees World Bank health programs in South Asia. Previously, he was practice manager of the Health Global Engagement Program of the World Bank, where he led strategy development and flagship initiatives. He spearheaded the World Bank's COVID-19 response as head of the Emergency Operations Center and was a principal architect of the global COVID-19 Multiphase Program. He has held various positions at the World Bank, including program leader for human development in Belarus, Moldova, and Ukraine; task manager for several African nations; and chair of the Health Partner Group in Ethiopia. From 2011 to 2014, he was the health manager at the African Development Bank, overseeing operations in 54 countries. He holds a PhD in population and health economics from Johns Hopkins University; an MPH from the University of California, Berkeley; and a medical degree from China. He is a faculty member at several universities, including the Harvard Finance Minister Executive Leadership Program.