

PILOT SCHEME

The government plans to introduce telemedicine solutions in 20 subdistrict health-promoting hospitals. **B4**

State pushes telemedicine pilot scheme

NBTC allots B180m for the project

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The Public Health Ministry and the telecom regulator plan to implement telemedicine solutions in 20 sub-district health-promoting hospitals nationwide this year to cope with increasing healthcare expenses.

The move aims to save the public spending of 38 billion baht a year after full implementation.

Digital infrastructure is crucial for providing public health service, especially as Thailand is on course to move from an ageing society to an aged society by 2022, the fastest pace among developing countries.

According to a report by the central bank, Thailand will be the first developing country to become a hyper-aged society, with 20% of the population above the age of 65, similar to the pattern in Japan.

Thailand is on track to become hyper-aged by 2035, while at the same time facing a middle-income

trap. More importantly, estimated healthcare expense for the elderly in Thailand will rise from 0.6% to 1.1% of GDP from 2010 to 2022.

Takorn Tantasith, secretary-general of the National Broadcasting and Telecommunications Commission (NBTC), said the pilot project will focus on four key health problems: high blood pressure, diabetes, eye disorders and skin diseases.

These four health problems accounted for more than 70% cases for patients going to those sub-district hospitals, Mr Takorn said on the sidelines of a seminar yesterday on "Digital Technology and Transformation to Smart Life & Ageing Society", jointly held by the Telecommunications Association of Thailand and the Telecommunications Association of Japan (TTA).

The NBTC set an initial budget of 180 million baht for all related digital equipment used at smart hospitals and for telemedicine in the pilot phase.

The budget is to cover five years of operation at the hospitals.

"The NBTC will not be involved in the decision to buy the equipment, as that is all up to the hospitals," he said.

"People will benefit from the smart hospitals and telemedicine, especially those who hold a health insurance card [30-baht universal scheme]."

Mr Takorn said the NBTC and Public Health Ministry would jointly sign a cooperative agreement to initiate the project by March this year.

The smart hospital and telemedicine project complements the broadband network infrastructure installed in villages through NBTC funding, he said.

Kazuo Sobue, president of the TTA, said 28% of the population in Japan was older than 65 in 2017 and that figure is expected to increase to 33% by 2036.

Managing an ageing society has been a critical agenda for Japan for years.

Japan wants to create a socio-economic system through adoption of innovative technology, especially artificial intelligence, robotics, social security, and Internet of Things.

Katsuhiko Kawasoe, senior vice-president of Nippon Telegraph and Telephone Corporation, said the company transformed its R&D for communications to create value and improve society under the concept of a smart world.