



## Japan needs to improve the efficiency of its health care system, says OECD

Japan has good health outcomes and has rapidly increased its spending on health care in recent years. It now needs to focus on improving efficiency of its health system in order to continue delivering high-quality care while containing costs, according to a new OECD report.

**Health at a Glance 2013** shows that Japan continues to enjoy one of the highest life expectancies among OECD countries (79 and 86 years for men and women respectively, compared with an OECD average of 77 and 83 years in 2011).

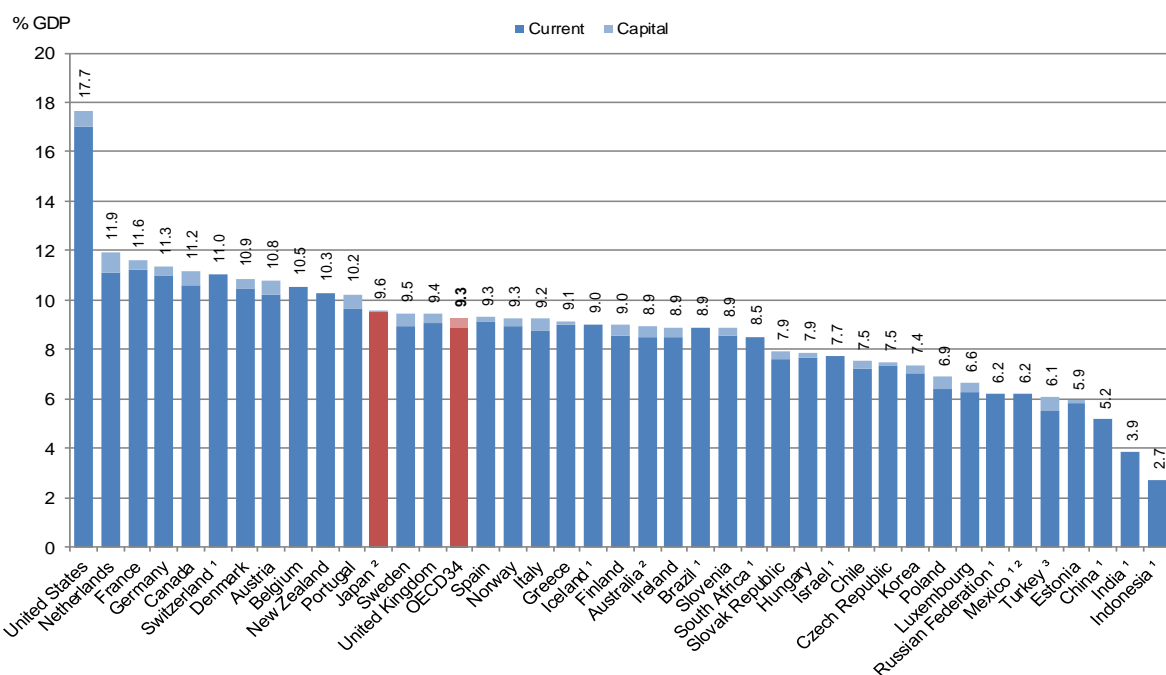
The population has good access to high-quality care. Equal access to health care in Japan is promoted by a relatively high share of public spending (82% of total health spending compared with an OECD average of 72%) and a fairly equal geographic distribution of doctors. In addition, the quality of health care in Japan is good in many areas, including cancer care and stroke treatment.

**OECD Health at a Glance 2013** also reports that, compared with most other OECD countries, total health spending in Japan has increased rapidly in recent years, by nearly 5% per year in 2009 and in 2010. For the first time in 2010, the share of GDP allocated to health in Japan (9.6%) was greater than the OECD average (9.3%). The OECD report signals a number of opportunities to improve value for money spent on health in Japan.

Although the average length of stay in hospitals in Japan has come down significantly since 2000, it still remains the highest in the OECD: 18 days compared to an average of 8. Strategic reductions in hospital beds together with the development of community care and long-term care services outside hospitals could reduce further the average length of stay.

Japan would also get better value for money for its health spending by promoting the use of generic drugs. **Health at a Glance 2013** shows that pharmaceutical expenditure per capita in Japan is the fourth highest among OECD countries, after the United States, Canada and Greece. While the share of the generic market has increased over the past five years, it still accounted for less than 25% of the total volume of consumption in Japan in 2011, compared to 75% in Germany and the United Kingdom. Further initiatives to encourage the prescription and consumption of generic drugs can help reduce expenditure without affecting health outcomes.

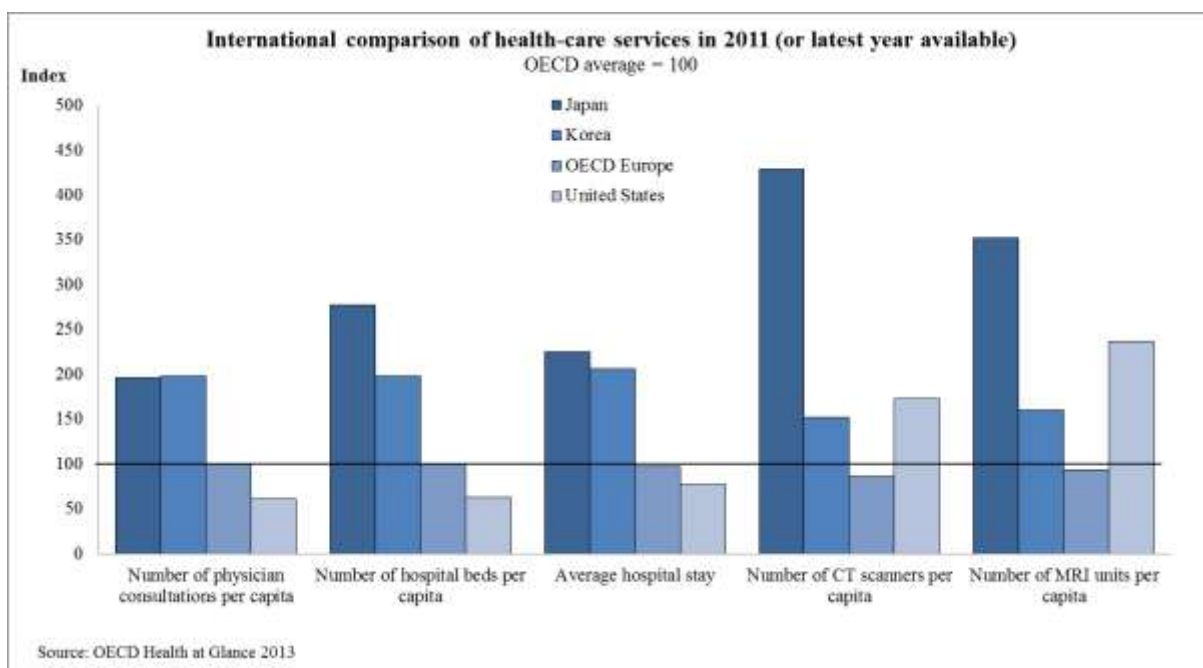
### Health expenditure as a share of GDP, 2011 (or nearest year)



1. Total expenditure only.

2. Data refers to 2010. 3. Data refers to 2008.

Source: OECD Health Statistics 2013, <http://dx.doi.org/10.1787/health-data-en>; WHO Global Health Expenditure Database.



These data are derived from the latest edition of *Health at a Glance* published by the Paris-based OECD. This report brings together international data on a wide range of health topics including health outcomes, health care access, resources and quality as well as expenditure. Expenditure data for Japan refer to 2010. To obtain a copy of the publication or for any question, journalists are invited to contact Naoko Kawaguchi (tel. 03-5532-0026 or [naoko.kawaguchi@oecd.org](mailto:naoko.kawaguchi@oecd.org)) or Gaetan Lafortune (tel. +33 1 45 24 92 67 or [gaetan.lafortune@oecd.org](mailto:gaetan.lafortune@oecd.org)).

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