

29 July 2022

H.E. Anutin Charnvirakul

Chair, High-Level Meeting on Health and the Economy
Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Public Health
Thailand

Excellency:

Nearly twenty years ago when the Kingdom of Thailand last hosted APEC in 2003, the region was in the midst of the SARS outbreak. APEC responded by endorsing the Action Plan on Severe Acute Respiratory Syndrome (SARS) and APEC Health Security Initiative; and establishing the APEC Health Task Force. As we progress through the third year of the global COVID-19 pandemic, the importance of collaboration between the public and private sectors on health, life sciences and economic issues remains absolutely essential and a distinct strength of APEC as an institution.

It is clear that there will be no sustained economic recovery without health recovery by ending the pandemic, preventing future health crises, and regaining losses in Universal Health Coverage. Towards that end, we put forward the following priority recommendations:

Reopening borders for safe and seamless travel. APEC economies must continue to make efforts to improve regional coherence as borders reopen and travel resumes. We support APEC's efforts to share information on the interoperability of vaccination certificates; the development of an information portal for safe passage across the region; as well as discussions on the use of health technologies to restore cross-border travel in APEC post-COVID-19.

Facilitate the movement of essential goods and services needed to combat the pandemic. APEC economies should continue to promote the efficient flow of essential goods and services including COVID-19 vaccines, diagnostics, therapeutics, personal protective equipment, and other critical medical products while identifying and eliminating any unnecessary barriers to trade for these goods.

Build resilience against future pandemics. With the growing frequency and severity of epidemic outbreaks, economies need to prepare for the strong likelihood of another pandemic within the next few years. This could be addressed through the establishment of an Epidemic Risk Markets Platform, which can enable wider participation of capacity providers to meet the massive needs of indemnification and promote affordability by combining insurance and contingent lending.

Accelerate Regulatory Convergence. Regulatory frameworks that are aligned to international best practice help economies avoid unnecessary duplication and allow for faster development and dissemination of safe and effective treatments. APEC should continue to prioritize its work on regulatory convergence for medical products.

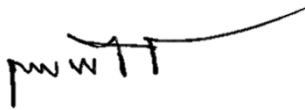
Promote innovative and sustainable healthcare financing mechanisms. ABAC welcomes APEC Ministers call to “invest in sustainable, resilient, innovative, and equitable health systems as strategic assets” as well as calls to enhance collaboration with the APEC Finance Ministers Process and Asia-Pacific Financial Forum (APFF) to explore the use of innovative and alternative funding and financing models to expand access to medical products and services. We urge APEC economies to continue this work and implement the APEC Healthcare Financing Roadmap endorsed last year. Investments in pandemic preparedness, health system strengthening, and Universal Health Coverage are important not just for improving health outcomes in economies, but for the health of the entire region.

Continue work to accelerate the adoption of digital technologies and strengthen digital infrastructure. APEC should continue to leverage the digital economy and put in place policies that promote innovation, the adoption of digital technologies, and sharing of data across borders in support of healthier economies. We look forward to the development of the ABAC digital health report which focuses on the value creation from real world data through artificial intelligence (AI).

Deepen engagement with ABAC and the private sector. With the sunset of the APEC Life Sciences Innovation Forum, it will be more important than ever to ensure sustained and meaningful engagement with the private sector on health-related issues within APEC. We encourage officials to consider strengthening private sector engagement in APEC’s health workstreams.

We look forward to continued close collaboration between the public and private sectors as we implement the 2022 APEC theme of: Open, Connect, Balance.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Kriengkrai Thiennukul', with a long horizontal flourish extending to the right.

Kriengkrai Thiennukul
ABAC Chair 2022