

Essential medicines are the medicines that satisfy the priority health care needs of a population. They are selected according to public health relevance, evidence on efficacy and safety and comparative cost–effectiveness. Essential medicines are intended to be available within the context of functioning health systems at all times in adequate amounts, in the appropriate dosage forms, with assured quality and adequate information, and at a price the individual and the community can afford.

The implementation of the concept of essential medicines is intended to be flexible and adaptable to many different situations; exactly which medicines are regarded as essential remains a national responsibility. Sustainable and equitable provision of essential medicines is one of the eight core elements of primary health care. Responding to country needs, WHO's medicines strategy focuses on: medicines policy; access; quality and safety; and rational use.

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