

# Improving medicines access in Brazil through collaboration in the PPRI network

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## Abstract

In 2020, Brazil joined Pharmaceutical Pricing and Reimbursement Information (PPRI). PPRI is a network of public authorities responsible for pharmaceutical pricing and reimbursement policies from 50, mainly European, countries. It offers a platform to its members to share information and experiences regarding pricing and reimbursement policies for medicines, and this helps improve access to affordable medicines. Information-sharing is done, among others, through network queries, country reports, meetings and webinars. Contributing to the PPRI network activities, Brazil can benefit from the policy experience of the other countries.

**Keywords:** pricing; reimbursement policies; universal health coverage; access to medicines and health technologies; technical cooperation; information sharing.

## Melhorando o acesso a medicamentos no Brasil por meio da colaboração na rede PPRI

### Resumo

Em 2020, o Brasil aderiu à Rede de Informações sobre Precificação e Reembolso de medicamentos [*Pharmaceutical Pricing and Reimbursement Information* (PPRI)]. A PPRI é uma rede de autoridades públicas responsáveis pelas políticas de precificação e reembolso ou incorporação de produtos farmacêuticos de 50 países, principalmente europeus. Oferece uma plataforma para seus membros compartilharem informações e experiências sobre políticas de precificação e reembolso ou incorporação de medicamentos, o que ajuda a melhorar o acesso a medicamentos a preços acessíveis. O compartilhamento de informações é feito, entre outros, por meio de consultas à rede, relatórios de país, reuniões presenciais e virtuais (*webinars*). Contribuindo para as atividades da rede PPRI, o Brasil pode beneficiar-se da experiência política de outros países.

**Palavras-chave:** precificação; incorporação; políticas de reembolso; cobertura universal de saúde; acesso a medicamentos e tecnologias; cooperação técnica; intercâmbio de informação.

### Introduction

Brazil has made progress towards universal health coverage. Still, ensuring affordable access to essential medicines remains a major issue. Medicines with high price tags and limited evidence, shortages and tight budgets had challenged the Brazilian health care system already before it was hit by the COVID-19 pandemic.<sup>1</sup>

Brazil is not alone. All countries, including high-income countries, face similar challenges, though to a different extent, regarding patient access to medicines. Even the richest countries have to make hard choices, and their financial sustainability is at risk.<sup>2</sup> Pricing and reimbursement (coverage) policies are major instruments for decision-makers, and their implementation impacts patient accessibility, including affordability, of medicines.<sup>2</sup>

Pricing and reimbursement of medicines is a national competence in all countries. Pricing relates to regulating prices of medicines, whereas reimbursement refers to coverage of pharmaceutical expenditure by public payers. Even in the European Union (EU) where marketing authorisation has been harmonised, every EU country takes its own decision on whether, or not, a medicine will be

funded, and at which price. Cross-country collaboration has grown in the last decade, since exchange of information and experience on pharmaceutical policies is of substantial value for public authorities.

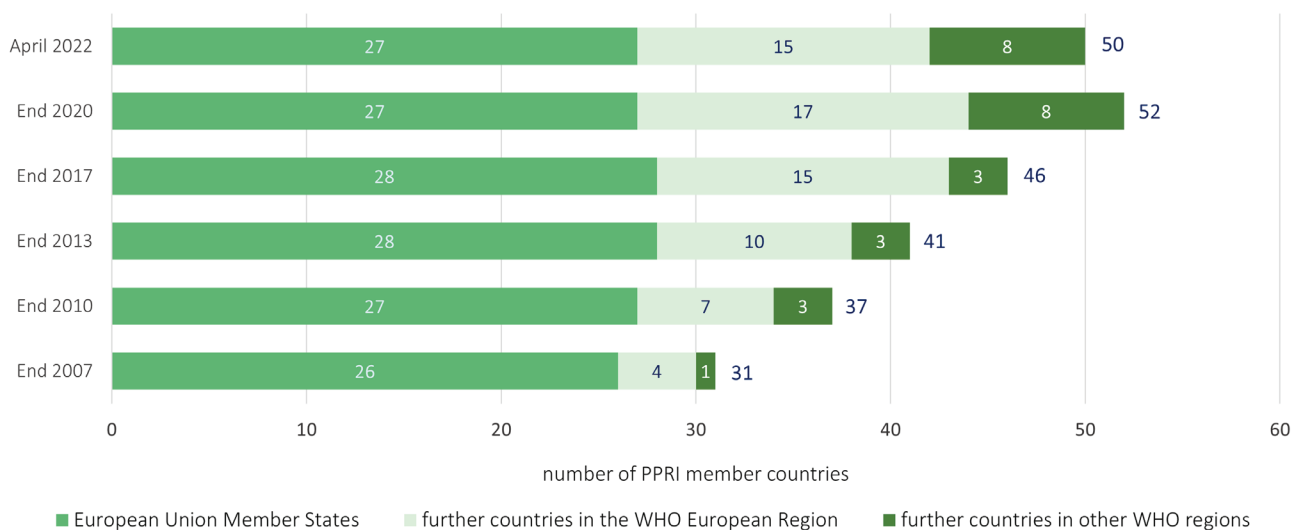
### Learning from other countries

One of the oldest collaborations in this policy area is Pharmaceutical Pricing and Reimbursement Information (PPRI), which dates back to the year 2005. Brazil joined the PPRI network in 2020. PPRI is a network of public authorities that are in charge of pricing and reimbursement (coverage by public payers) of medicines and – since its creation of a sub-group on medical devices in 2018 – also of authorities responsible for pricing and reimbursement of medical devices, Table 1.

In May 2022, PPRI comprised 50 countries, mainly from the World Health Organization (WHO) European Region, which includes European and Central Asian countries. In addition, all relevant European and international institutions (e.g. European Commission, Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development, WHO, World Bank) are PPRI network members. Figure 1 visualises the geographic extension of PPRI over the years.



**Figure 1.** PPRI network members – extension in the course of the initiative.

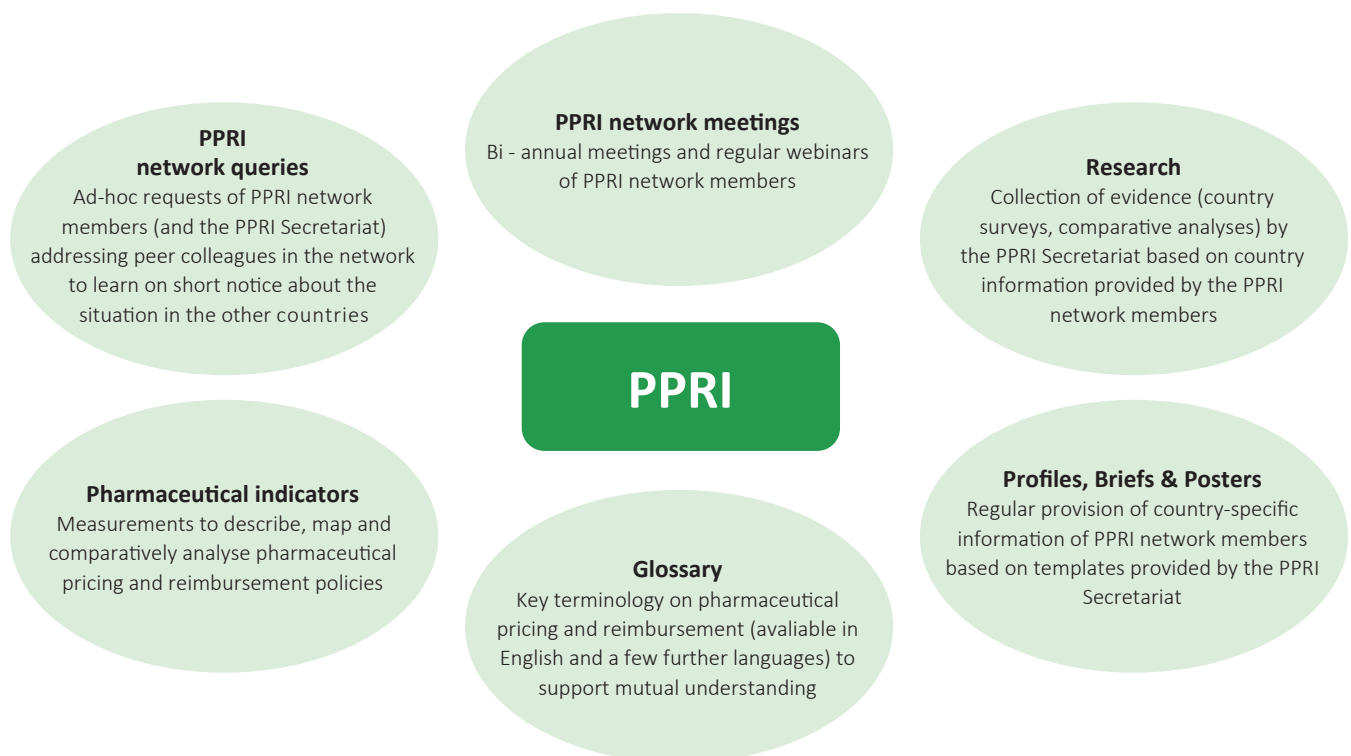


In April 2022, membership of the Russian Federation and Belarus were suspended. PPRI: Pharmaceutical Pricing and Reimbursement Information; WHO: World Health Organization.

Starting as a research project co-funded by the European Commission, PPRI established a network of public authorities and produced several deliverables, such as PPRI Pharma, a glossary, a glossary, a set of indicators to measure pharmaceutical pricing and reimbursement policies and a comparative analysis of pharmaceutical policies across countries (Table 2).<sup>3</sup>

The research project ended in 2007. The PPRI “model” was perceived valuable by its members so that they sought for a solution to continue the collaboration. The Austrian National Public Health Institute (GÖG), that had managed the PPRI research project, agreed to take over the coordinating function of the PPRI Secretariat.

**Figure 2.** Pharmaceutical Pricing and Reimbursement Information (PPRI) tools.



PPRI: Pharmaceutical Pricing and Reimbursement Information

The developed “tools” continued to be successfully used ever since (cf. Figure 2 on the PPRI tools). Related initiatives and sub-networks (e.g. the “sister project Pharmaceutical Health Information System/PHIS with a focus on medicines used in hospitals, the PPRI sub-group on medical devices and the PPRI Eastern Europe and Central Asia (EECA) network, cf. Table 1) also benefited from these tools that had been adapted to the specific needs of the members.<sup>4</sup>

The network of public authorities is the heart of PPRI. Bi-annual network meetings (face-to-face events in pre-COVID-19 times), supplemented by webinars on timely topics, allowed the experts of the around 90 member institutions to meet and exchange experience. The PPRI network meetings have also been serving as an opportunity to collect data and information in a structured way, such as via posters prepared by the participants on recent policy changes in the countries.

**Table 1.** History of PPRI: developments in thematic and regional scope.

Name	Rationale	Scope/Description/Output	Language	Funding	Status	Source
Pharmaceutical Pricing and Reimbursement Information (PPRI) – research project	To ensure sharing of information among countries that struggle with similar challenges	Network and research project focused on European Union (EU) Member States Establishment of a network of 31 countries, thereof 26 EU Member States A glossary of pharmaceutical terms, 22 PPRI Pharma Profiles, a list of meta-indicators and a comparative analysis	English	European Commission and Austrian Ministry of Health, Family and Youth	2005 - 2007	Vogler <i>et al.</i> <sup>3</sup>
Pharmaceutical Health Information System (PHIS)	To continue the work of the PPRI research project, with a specific focus on medicines in hospitals	Network and research project focused on EU Member States Network extended to 35 countries, thereof all 27 Member States, including representatives from the hospital sector (hospital pharmacists, hospital managers) Glossary of pharmaceutical terms extended to terms of the hospital sector, 20 PHIS Hospital Pharma reports, a list of meta-indicators fed into a cross-country PHIS database PHIS Hospital Pharma Report offering information on inpatient policies in 27 European countries and “real” prices paid by hospitals in five countries based on confidential discounts	English	European Commission and Austrian Ministry of Health	2008 - 2011	Vogler S, Habl C, Leopold C, et.al. <sup>6</sup>
Pharmaceutical Pricing and Reimbursement Information (PPRI) – countries-driven sustainable network	To continue the work of the PPRI and PHIS research projects and to address specific challenges of countries through information-sharing, capacity-building and research	Continuation of the activities of the PPRI research project and of the PHIS project after the end of the latter project PPRI tools adapted and extended: glossaries (in English and in further languages: German, Dutch and Spanish); different reporting templates for collecting information (Pharma Profiles, Brief Pharma Reports, Pharma Briefs) and production of country posters and reports; indicators and comparative analyses Use of cross-country information for research work Approximately 600 PPRI network queries among members, supported by the PPRI Secretariat (guidelines, encouraging contributions of all to ensure compliance with the “give-and-take” principle) Bi-annual network meetings and webinars Collaboration with an Advisory Board established in 2017	English	Coordination of the PPRI Secretariat funded by the Austrian Ministry of Health	Since 2008 - ongoing	Vogler <i>et al.</i> <sup>4</sup>
Pharmaceutical Pricing and Reimbursement Information Eastern Europe and Central Asia (PPRI EECA)	To use the good practice of PPRI and to adapt it to the specific needs of countries in a region	Regional network of 12 countries in Eastern Europe and Central Asia (EECA) (former Soviet Union countries) - membership to PPRI EECA and the large PPRI network is not conflicting Adaption to the PPRI tools (PPRI Pharma Profiles, indicators, comparative analysis, glossary in Russian) to the specific needs of these countries Annual network meetings Membership to PPRI EECA and the large PPRI network is not conflicting	Russian	World Health Organization Regional Office for Europe	Since 2017 - ongoing	Vogler S, Zimmermann N, Dedet G, et.al. <sup>6</sup>
Sub-group on medical devices of the PPRI network (PPRI MD)	To respond to the request of members to use the PPRI model for collaboration on policies for medical devices	Establishment of a sub-group with experts for medical devices in the PPRI countries Annual network meetings Work on adapting the PPRI tools to the areas of medical devices Comparative analysis on pricing and reimbursement policies for medical devices	English	Coordination of the PPRI Secretariat funded by the Austrian Ministry of Health	Since 2018 - ongoing	WHO Collaborating Centre for Pharmaceutical Pricing and Reimbursement Policies <sup>7</sup>



In addition, systematic national policy information is also provided in the so-called PPRI Pharma Profiles and PPRI Pharma Briefs, which are country reports (available in different levels of detail) of the pharmaceutical policy framework in the PPRI member countries (Table 2).

A major asset of PPRI is the so-called PPRI network queries.<sup>4</sup> They are ad-hoc requests that PPRI network members address to their peers to learn about policy solutions, legal approaches or data on specific issues in the other countries. PPRI network queries tend to ask for quick responses, since frequently the Minister may already be waiting for information on the other countries, as basis for decision-making.

PPRI network queries started in late 2007 when one PPRI participant was urgently seeking information on a specific matter in the other countries. Other members followed this example. By May 2022, nearly 600 queries had been launched.

### Impact of PPRI on accessibility of medicines

It is obvious that information sharing helps public authorities to take better informed decisions. But can it actually improve patient access to medicines?

It does. For instance, the collection of generic market share data in the PPRI countries showed that Portugal always had higher generic market shares in value than in volume – in contrast to the other countries. High shares in value point to high generic prices, which undermine possible benefits of generic penetration and limit the savings potential of generics that could be used for funding new medicines. With the cross-country comparison in hand, Portuguese policy-makers could make a case to change the price methodology for generics: from 2010 on, Portugal has been setting the reference price, which constituted the benchmark for public funding, at the average of the generics in a reference group instead of the highest generic price. Soon after, the Portuguese generic market shares in value dropped and were more aligned to the those in other countries.<sup>8</sup>

This example and some other policy cases to which PPRI information contributed (e.g. prompting price regulation in some countries, changes in the co-payment regulation) resulted in PPRI being short-listed for the European Health Forum Gastein Award in 2009 and for being selected as a good practice project of the EU Public Health Programme 2003-2008.<sup>9</sup>

### PPRI is unique

Since PPRI's start fifteen years ago, the landscape of networks and collaborations has changed, at least in Europe where some new initiatives and projects have been launched. However, PPRI is different, for several reasons:

First, PPRI is a countries-driven network, with the coordinating function allocated to an institution in one member country (the PPRI Secretariat located in Austria). While it is not led by an international institution, all relevant European and international institutions are on board and contribute to the international policy discussion.

Second, PPRI is an informal network. For instance, PPRI does not publish position papers. This informal character, accompanied by mutual understanding and respect, encourages members to openly share information and experience with policies, including failures.

Third, PPRI members are technical experts working in public authorities and dealing with pricing and/or reimbursement (coverage) issues on a daily basis. Offering a platform for sharing and critically reviewing policy experience, PPRI also has a capacity-building component.

Fourth, despite its informal character, PPRI membership is linked to commitments. The value of PPRI results from the contributions of all provided in respect of a "give-and-take" principle. When public authorities join PPRI, they commit to provide non-confidential information on their country. Requests for information are regularly launched (e.g. bi-annual updates on policy measures) by the PPRI Secretariat and, more frequently, by member countries.

**Table 2.** PPRI library.

Library item	URL
<b>PPRI Pharma Profiles/PPRI Pharma Briefs</b> Country information on pricing and reimbursement policies for medicines (extension for medical devices planned), available in different levels of detail	<a href="https://ppri.goeg.at/ppri_pharma_profiles">https://ppri.goeg.at/ppri_pharma_profiles</a>
<b>PPRI Posters</b> Country information on recent policy changes, flow-charts of the pharmaceutical system, data on specific topics	<a href="https://ppri.goeg.at/ppri_posters">https://ppri.goeg.at/ppri_posters</a>
<b>Reporting templates</b> Templates for different format to present country information (e.g. posters, country profiles), regularly updated, for use by members	<a href="https://ppri.goeg.at/methodology_documents">https://ppri.goeg.at/methodology_documents</a>
<b>Glossaries</b> Glossaries of key pharmaceutical terms in English (including an online glossary) and translations in German, Dutch, Russian and Spanish	<a href="https://ppri.goeg.at/methodology_documents">https://ppri.goeg.at/methodology_documents</a> <a href="https://ppri.goeg.at/about_translations">https://ppri.goeg.at/about_translations</a>
<b>Indicators</b> Compilation of measurement to describe and map pharmaceutical pricing and reimbursement policy frameworks	<a href="https://ppri.goeg.at/methodology_documents">https://ppri.goeg.at/methodology_documents</a>
<b>Technical reports</b> Publications (e.g. WHO technical reports, GÖG studies) fed by input of the PPRI network members	<a href="https://ppri.goeg.at/index.php/technical_reports">https://ppri.goeg.at/index.php/technical_reports</a>
<b>Scientific articles</b> Articles by the PPRI Secretariat or PPRI network members published in scientific papers fed by input of the PPRI network members	<a href="https://ppri.goeg.at/articles">https://ppri.goeg.at/articles</a> <a href="https://ppri.goeg.at/further_reading">https://ppri.goeg.at/further_reading</a>
<b>PPRI Conference Proceedings</b> Abstract Poster books, country poster books, publications of abstracts at the PPRI conferences	<a href="https://ppri.goeg.at/ppriconference2019">https://ppri.goeg.at/ppriconference2019</a> <a href="https://ppri.goeg.at/conference2015">https://ppri.goeg.at/conference2015</a> <a href="https://ppri.goeg.at/2ndPPRIconference">https://ppri.goeg.at/2ndPPRIconference</a>



Fifth, even if it is a “closed network” to offer a room to PPRI members to freely speak up, the PPRI Secretariat is committed to summarize and disseminate information, where possible, to the “outside” world. This is done through publications and events (cf. Table 2).

Sixth, the work of the PPRI network is accompanied by scientific analyses conducted by the PPRI Secretariat (e.g. cross-country analyses such as in the PPRI Report 2018, on the financial burden for medicines as well as overviews of policy measures and their impact).<sup>10-13</sup>

The PPRI Secretariat accepted ANVISA’s request to join PPRI, as it trusts that the information Brazil can share with the PPRI network is of interest to the other members. Having gained access to pharmaceutical pricing and reimbursement information in 51 further countries, to global learnings from policy implementation and to discussion on solutions for the future to improve access to medicines and being given the chance to meet peer colleagues struggling with similar challenges, Brazil can in return substantially benefit from its PPRI membership.

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### Declaration of conflict of interests

The authors declare that there are no conflicts of interest regarding this article.

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