

7TH INTERNATIONAL HEALTH RESEARCH CONFERENCE (IHRC) 2026: ADVANCING EVIDENCE-BASED HEALTH SYSTEMS IN PAKISTAN

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Abstract

The 7th International Health Research Conference (IHRC) 2026, organized by the Health Research Advisory Board (HealthRAB), was successfully held in Lahore on 16–17 May 2026, serving as an important platform to promote health research, innovation, and evidence-based healthcare in Pakistan. The conference featured an inaugural dinner at King Edward Medical University and the main scientific sessions at the Institute of Public Health, Lahore. Under the theme “One Nation, One Record, One Registry Network,” it emphasized integrated health systems, interoperable registries, digital health infrastructure, and data-driven healthcare governance.

The conference brought together national and international experts through keynote addresses, panel discussions, and three scientific sessions focused on digital health transformation, disease registries, research governance, stakeholder collaboration, and industry–academia partnerships. The event concluded with awards recognizing excellence in medical sciences, public health research, and health journalism.

As a major outcome, the conference generated five key recommendations focused on strengthening Pakistan’s health research ecosystem at the national directive, provincial implementation, and HealthRAB support levels. These include: establishing a National Disease Registry Network; strengthening research culture, capacity building, and collaborative networks; integrating digital health and research systems nationwide; enhancing government engagement, policy bridging, and evidence-based planning; and fostering national industry engagement alongside sustainable research financing.

Introduction

It is a matter of honor and privilege to present the report of the 7th International Health Research Conference (IHRC) 2026, which marked a

significant milestone in advancing health research and evidence-based healthcare in Pakistan. Organized by the Health Research Advisory Board (HealthRAB), the conference convened national

and international experts, policymakers, clinicians, researchers, and academicians to deliberate on health system strengthening, research governance, and translation of evidence into policy and practice. The conference comprised two signature events. The inaugural dinner was hosted by King Edward Medical University (KEMU), Lahore on 16 May 2026, followed by the main scientific conference hosted by the Institute of Public Health, on 17 May 2026.

Theme and Vision

The central theme, "One Nation, One Record, One Registry Network: Strengthening Health Systems through Evidence-Based Research," highlighted the urgent need for integrated national health information systems, interoperable disease registries, and data-driven decision-making. This theme aligned with global priorities on digital health transformation, health system integration, and research-informed governance, reflecting increasing recognition that sustainable healthcare improvement depends on unified, high-quality data ecosystems.

Inaugural Dinner – King Edward Medical University (KEMU), Lahore

The inaugural dinner served as a platform for academic exchange and professional networking. Proceedings commenced with the recitation of the Holy Quran and the national anthem. Prof. Dr. Mehmood Ayaz, Vice Chancellor of KEMU and HealthRAB Board Member, delivered the welcome address, emphasizing the role of academic institutions in strengthening research culture and nurturing healthcare leadership. Prof. Dr. Abdul Basit, Chairman HealthRAB, highlighted the importance of collaborative research, institutional networking, and capacity building across the health sector. Prof. Dr. Zakiuddin Ahmed, General Secretary HealthRAB, outlined the organization's vision for strengthening research networks and promoting evidence-based healthcare practices nationwide. The event featured national leaderships, including Mr. Muhammad Aslam Ghauri, Federal Secretary,

Ministry of National Health Services, Regulations & Coordination (MoNHSR&C); Dr. Obaidullah, Chief Executive Officer, Drug Regulatory Authority of Pakistan (DRAP); Mr. Muhammad Arshad Qaimkhani, Chief Executive Officer, Prime Minister's Sehat Sahulat Program; and Dr. Faiza Bashir, Research Director, National Institutes of Health, along with other senior government officials and healthcare leaders.

Distinguished contributions were also made by other national leading experts, who collectively addressed digital health transformation, equitable healthcare delivery, and multidisciplinary collaboration. The vote of thanks was delivered by Vice Chairman HealthRAB, Prof. Dr. Iqbal Afridi.

Main Scientific Conference – Institute of Public Health, Lahore

The main conference featured keynote addresses, panel discussions, scientific presentations, and interactive academic sessions led by distinguished national and international experts. The welcome addresses of the inauguration session were delivered by the Prof. Dr. Saira Afzal, Dean of the Institute of Public Health and Prof. Dr. Abdul Basit, Chairman HealthRAB.

An annual report presented by Prof. Dr. Zakiuddin Ahmed, Secretary HealthRAB and Chairman Organizing Committee of IHRC, highlighted HealthRAB's achievements and ongoing efforts in expanding national research networks and fostering cross-institutional collaboration.

Prof. Dr. Mehmood Ayaz, Vice Chancellor of King Edward Medical University and Board Member of HealthRAB, spoke on the role of HealthRAB and its various initiatives in strengthening Pakistan's research ecosystem. He highlighted the importance of sustained academic collaboration and capacity building to translate research into meaningful health system improvements. Prof. Dr. Javed Akram emphasized the importance of strengthening Pakistan's research ecosystem through well-structured clinical registries. He noted that reliable, standardized data systems are essential for improving evidence-based decision-

making and guiding effective health policy. Dr. Faiza Bashir, Research Director at the National Institutes of Health, highlighted the role of NIH in strengthening national disease registries.

The session concluded with remarks from the chief guests, Mr. Muhammad Aslam Ghauri, MoNHSR&C, and Mr. Khawaja Salman Rafique, Minister for Specialized Healthcare & Medical Education, Punjab. They assured their continued support for initiatives aimed at improving clinical research infrastructure, expanding national registries, and promoting evidence-based policymaking. The chief guests reaffirmed the government's commitment to facilitating inter-institutional collaboration and sustainable investment in health research to enhance healthcare delivery across the country.

Scientific Session 1: One Nation, One Record, One Registry Network: Strengthening Health Systems through Evidence-Based Research

The scientific programme included a thematic plenary session titled "One Nation, One Record, One Registry Network: Strengthening Health Systems through Evidence-Based Research," moderated by Prof. Dr. Syed Shahid Noor, Finance Secretary & Chairman Registry Committee HealthRAB. The session examined the potential of integrated health registries in improving clinical care, disease surveillance, research capacity, and evidence-informed policymaking. International and national experts called for interoperable, standardized, and sustainable health information systems to support long-term health system strengthening.

Dr. Alexey Brovko, Senior Medical Advisor at Dendrite Clinical Systems, UK, highlighted the importance of clinical data and registries in improving healthcare quality, emphasizing their role in enabling better decision-making and outcome tracking. Mr. Amid Abu Hmaidan, Subject Matter Expert in Chronic Disease Registries and Lead for Qatar National Cancer Registry (DoH Abu Dhabi), discussed the value of chronic disease registries in advancing clinical research and supporting clinical trials, drawing on

international experience from established registry systems.

Dr. Shahram Gharib, Digital Health Transformation Consultant, Oman spoke on digital health maturity and the importance of building integrated health information systems. He emphasized how electronic medical records (EMRs) can be effectively linked with national registry databases to enable seamless data exchange, improve clinical decision-making, and strengthen population-level health insights. Dr. Maria Aamir, Assistant Professor at Abu Dhabi University and Former Head of SEHA Cancer Registry and Manager of Tawam Hospital Cancer Registry, Al Ain, UAE, spoke on the role of registries as a safety intelligence tool. She highlighted how well-structured registry system supports early detections of risks, improves patient safety monitoring and strengthens evidence-based healthcare decision making.

Scientific Session 2: The Role of Multiple Stakeholders in Strengthening Pakistan's Health Research Ecosystem

A second major session focused on "The Role of Multiple Stakeholders in Strengthening Pakistan's Health Research Ecosystem," chaired by Prof. Dr. M. Iqbal Chaudhry, Coordinator General COMSTECH and Director ICCBS, with co-chairs. The session was further graced by Khawaja Imran Nazir, Provincial Minister for Primary and Secondary Healthcare, Punjab. Participants from academia, government, and international organizations discussed research governance, translational science, capacity building, and cross-sector partnerships.

Prof. Dr. Seval Akgun, Chief Quality Officer at Baskent Health Hospital, Turkey, spoke on "The Role of Multiple Stakeholders in Strengthening Pakistan's Health Research Ecosystem."

Scientific Session 3: Industry-Academia-Government collaboration for strengthening the health research ecosystem

Another important panel discussion addressed industry-academia-government collaboration in strengthening the health research ecosystem,

chaired by Dr. Obaidullah Malik, Chief Executive Officer, DRAP. Stakeholders from pharmaceutical industries, regulatory authorities, and clinical research organizations explored strategies to promote innovation, clinical trials, and public-private partnerships in healthcare research.

Awards and Recognition

The conference concluded with the presentation of 2 prestigious awards recognizing outstanding contributions to medical science and research excellence: It includes Prof. Dr. Vohra Lifetime Achievement Award was presented to Prof. Dr. Syed Ather Enam, Professor of Neurosurgery, Director of Centre of Regenerative Medicine and Stem Cell Research, Director of Center of Oncological Research in Surgery, Scientific Director of Juma Research Laboratories, AKU Karachi. Second Hajra Billoo Gold Medal

National Health Research Awards was presented to Clinical Sciences to Prof. Dr. Javed Akram, Professor of Medicine, President, Pakistan Society of Internal Medicine, Basic Health Sciences to Prof. Dr. M. Iqbal Choudhary, Mustafa (pbuh) Prize Laureate, H.I., S.I., T.I., Coordinator General OIC-COMSTECH, M. A. Raoof Chair, IMBB, University of Lahore, Honorary Advisor, ICCBS and Public Health to Prof. Dr. Shahzad Ali Khan, Vice Chancellor, Health Services Academy, Board Member, HealthRAB. Health Journalism Award was presented to Mr. Amer Malik, Senior Reporter, The News International, Lahore.

Overall, the conference generated six key recommendations structured around national directive, provincial implementation, and HealthRAB support, offering a clear roadmap for translating evidence into policy and practice across the country (table 1).

Table 1: Key Recommendations of the 7th IHRC: National Directive, Provincial Implementation, and HealthRAB Support

National Directive	Provincial Implementation	HealthRAB Support
1. Establish a National Disease Registry Network		
Develop centralized, interoperable registries for major diseases across Pakistan. The registry shall be governed by a national body with a national steering committee to ensure oversight, standardization, and coordination.	Each province will establish its own provincial steering committee to break silos within provincial healthcare systems, integrate institutional registries into the national database, and ensure alignment with national governance frameworks.	HealthRAB will bring its collective knowledge and hands-on experience of the last 12 years of establishing national disease registries. HealthRAB will support technical assistance for registry integration, and help establish governance structures at both national and provincial levels. HealthRAB will also share its universal registry software which integrates most of its registries through a single login and single patient record.
2. Strengthen Research Culture, Capacity and Collaborative Networks		
Promote ethical research through training in research methodology, biostatistics, writing, and grants. Replace silo-based	Each province will establish research units, develop local leadership, and connect experts through national platforms.	HealthRAB will organize conferences and lead training programs, develop collaboration platforms, foster networks, create synergy, and facilitate cross-provincial partnerships.

efforts with multidisciplinary, multicenter collaborations.		HealthRAB will also create digital collaborative platforms to gather all relevant stakeholders for online networking, discussions, research collaborations and activities.
3. Integrate Digital Health & Research Systems Nationally		
Develop national policy & strategy. Digitize hospital systems and link electronic medical records (EMRs) with research databases across the country.	Each province will adopt standardized data frameworks, interoperability protocols, and data security measures.	HealthRAB will advocate for national standards, support provincial implementation, and facilitate policy development for digital health integration. HealthRAB will also provide domain expertise from its national and international network
4. Government Engagement, Policy Bridging & Evidence-Based Planning		
Establish formal policy forums. Integrate research evidence into federal and provincial health planning and advocate for government investment. Include researchers in advisory bodies.	Each province will organize regular policy dialogues, include researchers in provincial advisory bodies, and ensure health planning is informed by local evidence.	HealthRAB will facilitate national and provincial policy forums, provide evidence briefs, advocate for investment, support inclusion of researchers in advisory bodies, and translate research into actionable policy recommendations.
5. Foster National Industry Engagement & Research Financing		
Encourage ethical academia-industry partnerships and sustainable funding across Pakistan.	Each province will engage local industry partners to support registries, research fellowships, and innovation programs.	HealthRAB will coordinate provincial efforts, and help create sustainable financing mechanisms.
6. Provide Evidence to Ensure Quality & Patient Safety in Healthcare Services		
Develop National standards & policy in healthcare quality & patient safety	Implement national standards & policy in consultation with local Healthcare Commissions	HealthRAB will initiate & facilitate relevant research & create local evidence to reduce preventable medical errors and improve healthcare quality. HealthRAB will establish a national patient safety registry to allow hospitals to share their data and outcomes

Conclusion

The 7th IHRC 2026 highlighted the importance of integrated health systems, collaboration, and digital innovation in advancing evidence-based healthcare in Pakistan. It also provided a clear roadmap for strengthening the country's health research and healthcare systems.

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Author's Contribution

AB: Substantial contributions to the conception or design of the work; revising it critically for important intellectual content; AND final approval of the version to be published

ZA: Revising it critically for important intellectual content; AND final approval of the version to be published; AND agreement to be accountable for all aspects of the work in ensuring that questions related to the accuracy or integrity of any part of the work are appropriately investigated and resolved.

NW: Substantial contributions to the conception or design of the work; AND drafting the manuscript

KL: Critically reviewed, edited and approved the manuscript.

