

Middle East’s NICE move towards standardized Health Technology Assessment

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INTRODUCTION

- As the UAE strengthen its healthcare infrastructure, the Department of Health in Abu Dhabi (DoH) has introduced formal health technology assessment (HTA) guidelines
- This development aligns with global trends and invites comparison with established HTA frameworks

OBJECTIVE

- The aim of this research is to compare the DoH HTA guidelines (2025) with the UK’s National Institute for Health and Care Excellence (NICE) guidelines, highlighting methodological similarities and differences, and exploring the implications for pharmaceutical and medical device manufacturers seeking reimbursement in Abu Dhabi

METHODS

- The comparison focused on key HTA components:
 - Submission requirements
 - Clinical and economic evidence standards
 - Budget impact and cost-effectiveness thresholds
 - Stakeholder engagement opportunities
 - Timelines and transparency

RESULTS

- Similar to NICE, the DoH HTA guidelines emphasize added clinical value and cost-effectiveness as key decision drivers
- However, budget impact plays a more significant role in the DoH assessment
- In line with NICE, RCTs are considered the gold standard for the clinical assessment, with RWE accepted as supportive evidence
- While NICE uses defined cost-effectiveness thresholds adjusted for disease severity, the DoH adopts a more flexible approach: The threshold is based on GDP per capita and is adjusted for disease severity, rarity, and the magnitude of QALY gains
- The guidelines introduce an expedited and temporary access pathways for severe, rare or disabling diseases without alternative treatment options
- The submission process is similar to NICE, and engagement with the DoH through early advice is highly encouraged; timelines for the appraisal in a full HTA process and expedited access are 60 and 30 days, respectively

Table 1: Comparison between NICE and DoH HTA processes

Key HTA components	NICE National Institute for Health and Care Excellence	دائرة الصحة DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH
 Clinical effectiveness	RCTs preferred Non-randomised studies and RWE may complement RCTs Systematic review (and meta-analysis if feasible) of clinical studies is mandatory	
 Cost effectiveness threshold	STA: £20-£30,000/QALY QALY multiplier based on disease severity (QALY shortfall) HST: £100,000/QALY	Dynamic: 0.75xGDP 3 threshold multipliers: disease severity; relative health gain; disease rarity
 Budget impact	5-year time horizon. Interventions exceeding £20M in 3 years trigger additional discussions with NHS	3-year time horizon. No official budget threshold
 Alternative access pathways	CDF and IMF: Temporary managed access process for cancer and innovative therapies while additional data is being collected to address uncertainty	Expedited access: Faster and temporary access for serious, rare, or disabling disease therapies
 Timelines from submission to decision	23 to 32 weeks (Full STA) Technical engagement adds 2 months to the timelines	60 days (full process) 30 days (expedited access) Clock stops for additional information requests

CONCLUSIONS

- Abu Dhabi’s HTA framework reflects a pragmatic adaptation of international best practices from established cost-effectiveness driven markets, tailored to local healthcare needs
- Ambitious HTA timelines may lead to faster reimbursement and access to innovative therapies in Abu Dhabi
- Similarities in evidence requirements and review processes with established HTA frameworks support ease of submission for global manufacturers, though tailoring the evidence package and early engagement remain critical to ensure successful reimbursement

REFERENCES

NICE health technology evaluations: the manual; available at: <https://www.nice.org.uk/process/pmg36>

NICE Single technology appraisal (STA) timeline; available at: <https://www.nice.org.uk/what-nice-does/our-guidance/about-technology-appraisal-guidance/our-methods-and-processes-health-technology-evaluation-manual/technology-appraisal-processes-and-timelines/single-technology-appraisal-timeline>

Abu Dhabi Department of Health (DoH): Health Technology Assessment (HTA) guidelines; available at: <https://p4h.world/app/uploads/2025/07/Health-Technology-Assessment-guidelines-Abu-Dhabi.x29063.pdf>

