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Health Spending in Japan: Macro-fiscal Implications and Reform Options¹

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Abstract

Health spending has risen rapidly in Japan. We find two-thirds of the spending increase in 1990–2011 resulted from ageing, and the rest from excess cost growth. The spending level will rise further: ageing alone will raise it by 3½ percentage points of GDP in 2010–30, and excess cost growth at the rate observed in 1990–2011 will lead to an additional increase of 2–3 percentage points of GDP. This will require a sizable increase in government transfers. Japan can introduce micro- and macro-reforms to contain health spending, and financing options should be designed to enhance equity.

JEL Classification Numbers: H51, I10, I13, I18

Keywords: Japan, health spending, long-term care, fiscal policy

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