



Transforming Migraine Care in Hong Kong A Path to Enhanced Treatment Access

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Whitepaper prepared by:



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Glossary

AI	Artificial Intelligence
CGRP	Calcitonin Gene-Related Peptide
CUHKMC	The Chinese University of Hong Kong Medical Centre
HR	Human Resource
ICER	Institute for Clinical and Economic Review
IHS	International Headache Society
mAbs	Monoclonal Antibodies
MNMP	Multidisciplinary Panel on Neuropathic Pain
OTC	Over the Counter
PPP	Public-Private Partnerships
QALY	Quality-Adjusted Life Year
SIGN	Scottish Intercollegiate Guidelines Network
USD	United States Dollar

Executive Summary

Migraines are a silent epidemic in Hong Kong

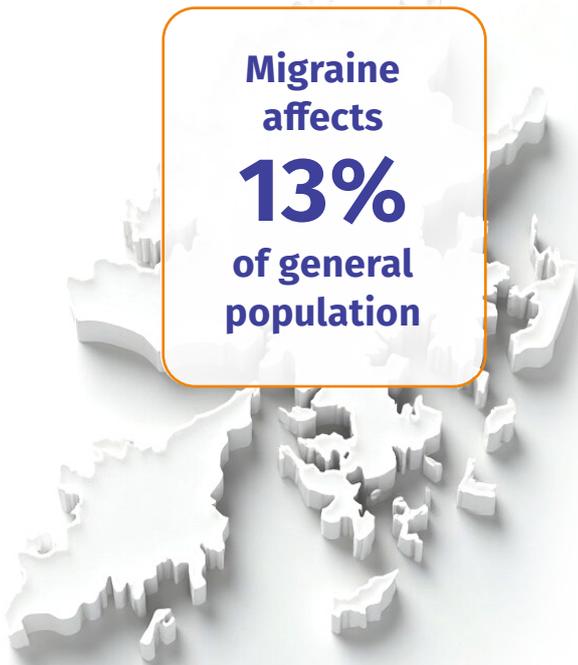
It affects nearly 13% of the population, predominantly working-age women, yet remaining widely misunderstood and underestimated^{1,2}. Despite their prevalence and debilitating impact, migraines are often dismissed as mere headaches, leading to significant underdiagnosis and inadequate treatment. This hidden burden takes a toll on individuals' quality of life, workplace productivity, and the broader economy^{2,3}.

Hong Kong faces a rising migraine prevalence fuelled by lifestyle, workplace stress, and systemic healthcare challenges such as limited access to, and insurance coverage for, advanced therapies, including CGRP therapies^{2,4}. Current treatment options fall short in efficacy and tolerability, leaving many patients reliant on ineffective or poorly tolerated medications^{5,6}. Meanwhile, the economic costs of unmanaged migraines, largely due to lost productivity, remain largely concealed under a culture of presenteeism and stigma^{7,8}.

This white paper explores innovative breakthroughs in migraine care, notably the advent of CGRP therapies, which offer transformative benefits in reducing migraine frequency and severity. Beyond clinical improvements, these treatments promise significant healthcare savings and enhanced social well-being. However, barriers such as restrictive reimbursement policies, insurance limitations, and gaps in primary care knowledge hinder their broad adoption.

Drawing lessons from global examples like the United Kingdom and Singapore, this report advocates for multi-stakeholder collaboration - uniting policymakers, healthcare providers, insurers, employers, and patient advocates - to reform reimbursement frameworks, expand primary care capacity, and foster public awareness. It also highlights the potential of innovative insurance models and digital health integration to bridge financial and access gaps sustainably.

Hong Kong should strive to recognise migraine as a critical public health priority and embrace evidence-based, locally tailored solutions that improve access to effective treatments and support. By doing so, the city can unlock healthier and more productive lives. It is imperative to act decisively now by educating stakeholders and innovating care delivery, ensuring that no one in Hong Kong has to endure migraines in silence.



**Migraine
affects
13%
of general
population**

1. Understanding the Hidden Burden of Migraines in Hong Kong

1.1 Epidemiology and Hong Kong's rising trends of migraines

Migraine is a debilitating neurological condition that is often misunderstood and underestimated, both globally and in Hong Kong.

2nd
leading cause of
disability globally^{2,9}

Leading cause
among young women
aged 15 - 49^{2,9}

Affecting approximately >1 Billion people³

The International Headache Society (IHS) defines chronic migraine as experiencing over 15 headache days per month for more than 3 months, which, on at least 8 days per month, has the features of migraine headache¹⁰. In Hong Kong, migraines impact an estimated 12.5% of the population¹. Its peak prevalence is observed in individuals aged 25 to 44, with women being about three times more likely to suffer from migraines than men¹¹. Its prevalence in Hong Kong has been rising significantly, increasing from 1.5% to 4.5% over the past two decades, highlighting an alarming trend¹². Several factors contribute to the increased frequency and severity of migraines, including poor sleep quality, unhealthy diets, stress, hormonal fluctuations and medication over use^{13,14,15}.

1.2 The overlooked & underestimated burden of migraines in Hong Kong

Despite its prevalence, the true impact of migraine remains largely hidden and underestimated. This is partly due to underdiagnosis and the widespread misconception that migraine is merely a minor ailment or a typical headache¹⁶. In Hong Kong, due to a lack of awareness, many individuals dismiss their symptoms, resulting in a reluctance to seek medical attention or fully convey the burden of their condition¹⁷.



Patients commonly self-diagnose any one-sided headache as migraine and resort to over-the-counter (OTC) painkillers rather than seeking proper medical care or preventive treatment¹⁷

Hong Kong-Based Neurologist

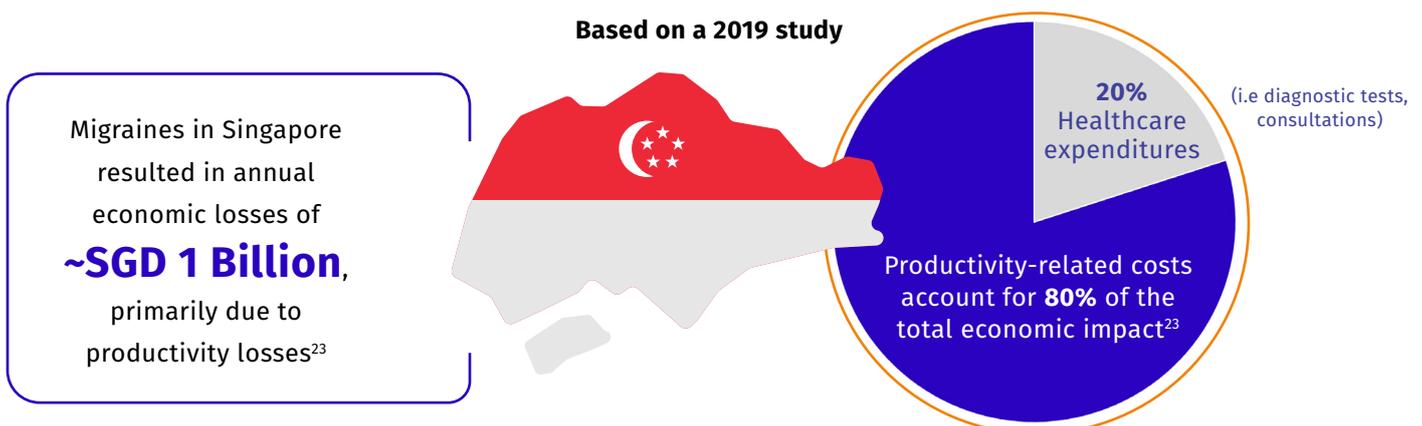
In reality, severe or chronic migraines can be debilitating, often leading to missed workdays and reduced productivity, which in turn have broader economic consequences. Hong Kong's healthcare system, while robust, often prioritises more visibly impactful conditions, such as cardiovascular disease and diabetes. In contrast, frontline clinicians have shared that chronic conditions like migraines, despite their heavy toll on quality of life, receive comparatively less recognition, funding, and public health attention¹⁷.

Compounding this challenge is the high prevalence of psychiatric comorbidities such as anxiety and depression among migraine sufferers. Multiple Asian real-world studies show that psychiatric diseases are common in migraine patients, leading to poorer outcomes and greater disability than those without psychiatric comorbidities^{18,19,20}. These comorbidities not only exacerbate migraine severity and frequency but also lead to more complex treatment needs, poorer treatment outcomes, and reduced quality of life^{21,22}. This interplay between migraine and mental health significantly increases healthcare utilisation and diminishes work productivity²².

1.3 Clinical and economic costs of unmanaged migraines in Hong Kong

Unmanaged or poorly managed migraines impose a substantial burden on individuals, society, and the economy. These burdens are twofold, encompassing direct costs such as hospital visits, medical consultations, and medications, and indirect costs, with the latter being significantly more impactful. Among indirect costs, lost productivity emerges as the primary contributor, highlighting migraines' significant economic impact on workplaces and beyond²³.

Insights from Singapore, a health system with demographic and economic similarities to Hong Kong, illustrate the significant economic implications of migraines.



The study further revealed that individuals suffering from chronic migraines missed an average of 9.8 workdays annually²³. Those who managed to attend work often experience reduced efficiency, leading to an additional 7.4 days of productivity loss per year²⁴. Hong Kong likely faces a comparable hidden loss in productivity. Human Resource (HR) experts highlight that Hong Kong employees often downplay symptoms or avoid taking leave for “invisible” conditions like migraine, choosing instead to work through attacks at reduced capacity²⁵. This culture of presenteeism conceals the true economic burden of migraines, which is likely far greater than official figures suggest^{25,26}.

In Hong Kong, migraines are intensified by the city’s fast-paced, high-pressure work culture^{4,8}

Long working hours, limited opportunities for rest, and heightened occupational pressures contribute to greater individual suffering while amplifying the economic and social burdens of the condition^{27,28}. Clinicians and employers consistently point to overwork and job-related stress as leading triggers for migraines among Hong Kong’s working population, which explains the rising migraine prevalence in this group^{17,25}.

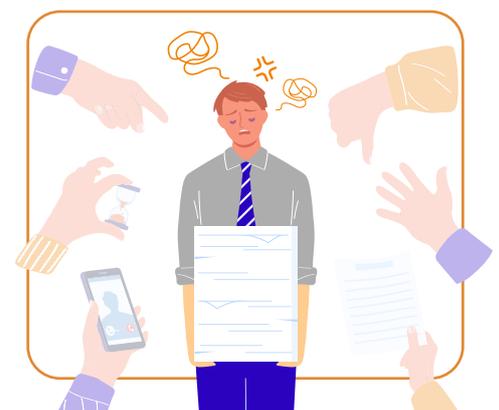


Furthermore, a cultural stigma around taking sick leave means employees often hide or downplay migraine symptoms to avoid negative judgments, according to corporate HR managers²⁵. This behaviour can lead to inadequate rest and recovery, thereby worsening health outcomes and reinforcing the hidden nature of migraine’s impact²⁶.

Beyond workplace-related challenges, systemic barriers in the healthcare landscape further intensify the burden. Gaps in reimbursement policies and reliance on out-of-pocket payments, disproportionately impact lower-income populations, creating inequities in access to effective treatments. Neurologists note that without insurance coverage or public subsidy, the majority of migraine patients in Hong Kong cannot afford newer, more effective treatments such as CGRP therapies. As a result, these patients are often left with limited or no viable options¹⁷.

Structural limitations within the healthcare system also poses a problem. Hong Kong’s high population density contributes to overcrowded public hospitals and long wait times, creating significant challenges for patients with chronic conditions like migraines^{29,30}. As a result, many do not receive timely or adequate care, leading to suboptimal management and further perpetuating the cycle of suffering, reduced productivity, and rising economic costs³¹.

These interwoven factors underscore the need for tailored approaches to migraine management in Hong Kong, which must address not only the clinical needs of patients but also the broader socio-economic determinants that influence care and outcomes.



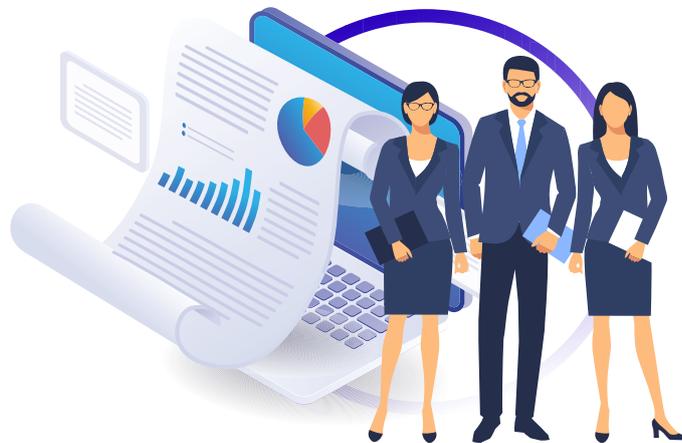
Given Hong Kong's distinct socio-economic and healthcare environment, solutions must be tailored, innovative, and grounded in the realities of local healthcare delivery. Academic experts stress that building a strong foundation of local evidence - on prevalence, treatment outcomes, and economic impact - is critical for influencing policy³².



Without local data, migraines remain sidelined in health planning and budget allocation. Local research, combined with sustained advocacy, is essential to elevate migraines on the health policy agenda and to secure the resources needed to address this condition equitably and effectively³²

Hong Kong-Based Academic Researcher in Neurology

Despite their wide-reaching impact, migraines remain an under-recognised public health issue in Hong Kong, often overlooked in policy discourse. This White Paper calls on policymakers and payers to take evidence-based, decisive action, drawing from global best practices but adapted to Hong Kong's unique context. Improved migraine management is not only a matter of clinical need but a strategic investment in the city's economic resilience and workforce sustainability.



2. Current Unmet Need in Migraine Management in Hong Kong

2.1 Migraine management in Hong Kong is limited by efficacy and patient accessibility

Migraine remains a prevalent and debilitating condition in Hong Kong, yet the management of the condition is marked by significant gaps in efficacy, accessibility, and patient adherence. Only one-third of chronic migraine patients report satisfaction with their current therapy, underscoring the inadequacy of existing options.



In clinical practice, migraine patients endure frequent, disruptive attacks despite having cycled through multiple medications. That said, many patients in Hong Kong continue to rely solely on basic acute painkillers, without ever accessing targeted acute treatments or necessary preventive therapies, showing a significant and persistent gap in migraine care¹⁷

Hong Kong-Based Neurologist

Acute management aim to alleviate or halt the progression of headaches. The Multidisciplinary Panel on Neuropathic Pain (MPNP) of Hong Kong provides treatment guidelines aligned with the Scottish Intercollegiate Guidelines Network (SIGN 155) on migraine management³³. While these guidelines are being reviewed to incorporate new evidence, current recommendations for acute migraine treatment include OTC pain relievers, migraine-specific drugs such as triptans, and combination therapies³⁴.

Among these traditional therapies, triptans are the most widely available migraine-specific medication, offering relief for some patients but presenting notable limitations. For patients who cannot use triptans, the other alternatives include combination analgesia, NSAID or small molecules CGRP therapies³⁵. The former two are less effective options which sometimes increases the risk of medication overuse, a condition that elevates the risk of chronic migraines by approximately 20-folds³⁶. Because of these shortcomings, many migraine patients are effectively left without truly adequate acute therapy, especially those who cannot tolerate triptans or do not respond well to them¹⁷.

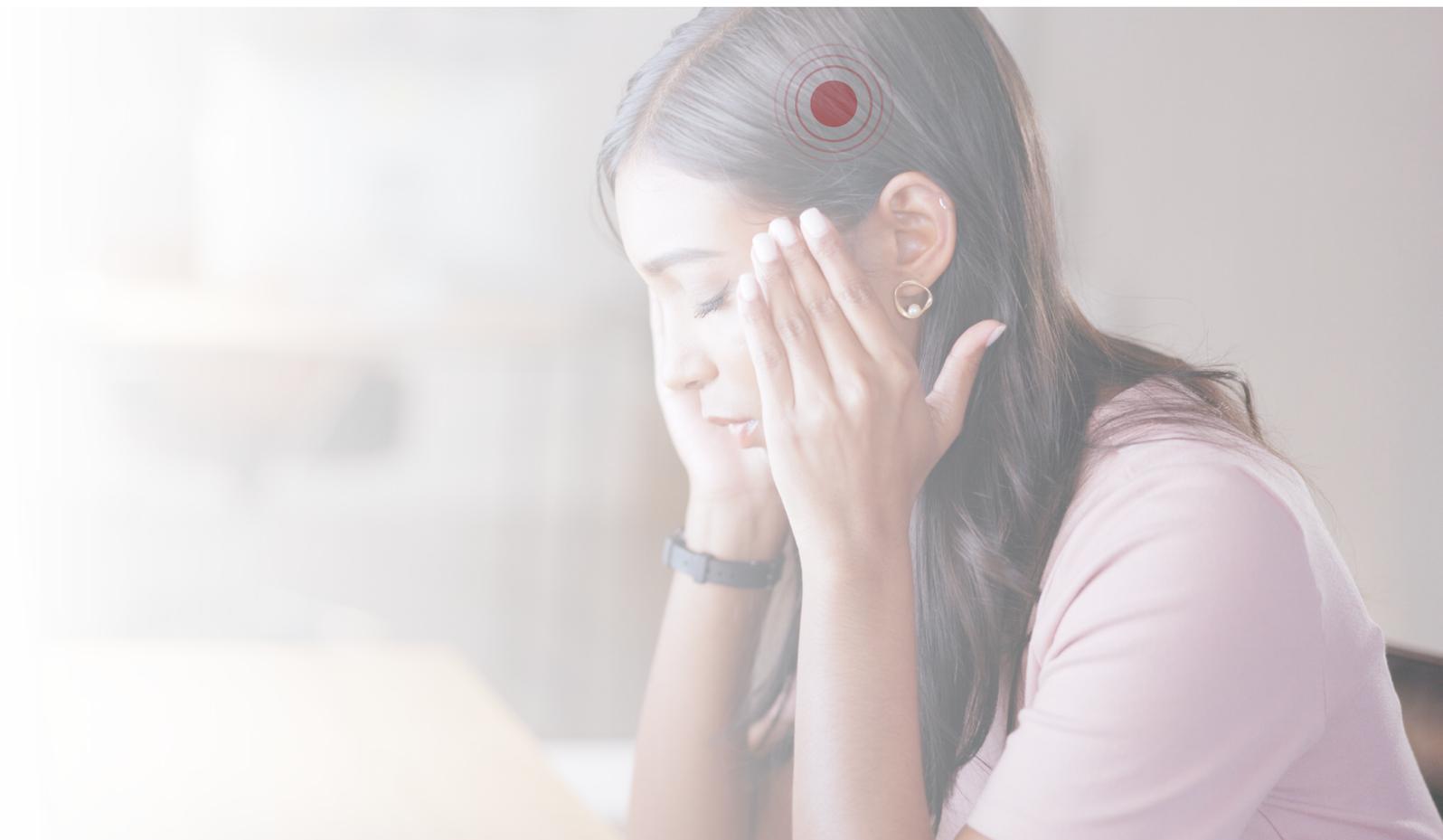
Preventing the progression from episodic to chronic migraine is a central goal in effective migraine management. However, current preventive treatments often fail to meet patient needs, putting many at risk of escalating symptoms and diminished quality of life. In Hong Kong, oral medications such as beta-blockers, anti-epileptics, and antidepressants are commonly prescribed, as recommended by the MPNP³⁴. Yet, these oral medications frequently cause side effects and drug interactions, which contribute to poor adherence and treatment discontinuation^{37,38}.

As a result, many patients are unable to achieve consistent migraine control, highlighting a pressing need for more tolerable and effective alternatives.



Preventive therapies remain significantly underutilised, especially at the primary care level. Many patients abandon prophylactic medications due to side effects, and others never start treatment unless they see a specialist. There is an urgent need to expand access to migraine-specific preventives with better tolerability and efficacy for better long-term management¹⁷

Hong Kong-Based Neurologist



3. The Value of Innovative Migraine Treatments & Barriers to Access

3.1 The transformative potential of innovative migraine treatments for patients who lack effective options

In recent years, the introduction of calcitonin gene-related peptide (CGRP) therapies have revolutionised migraine treatment. These innovative therapies fill the critical gaps in treatment, providing significant improvement in reducing migraine frequency³⁹ and alleviating the pain and most bothering symptoms during a migraine attack⁴⁰. It is an effective option for patients who do not respond to or cannot tolerate traditional treatments like triptans due to cardiovascular risks or other contraindications⁴¹.

Importantly, CGRP therapies are also associated with a more favourable side effect profile compared to conventional therapy options. Unlike treatments that often cause sedation, cognitive dulling, or gastrointestinal distress, patients using CGRP therapies generally report fewer adverse effects, improving their ability to adhere to treatment and maintain daily functioning⁴².



CGRP therapies are alternative choices for treatment-refractory patients. They offer a long-overdue alternative for those who have cycled through painkillers, triptans, and other options without success. Patients who can access this option now report meaningful and sustained relief¹⁷.

Hong Kong-Based Neurologist

3.2 CGRP therapies can deliver substantial economic benefits

The value of CGRP therapies extends beyond individual patients to healthcare systems and economies at large. By reducing the frequency of migraines and improving patient outcomes, these therapies decrease the need for costly emergency visits, rescue medications, and repeated healthcare consultations^{42,43}.

Evaluations conducted by the Institute for Clinical and Economic Review (ICER) further affirm the cost-effectiveness of various CGRP therapies. These findings underscore that CGRP treatments not only enhance clinical outcomes but also offer an economically sustainable option for the acute treatment of migraine in adults, particularly when compared to 5-HT_{1F} receptor agonists⁴⁴.

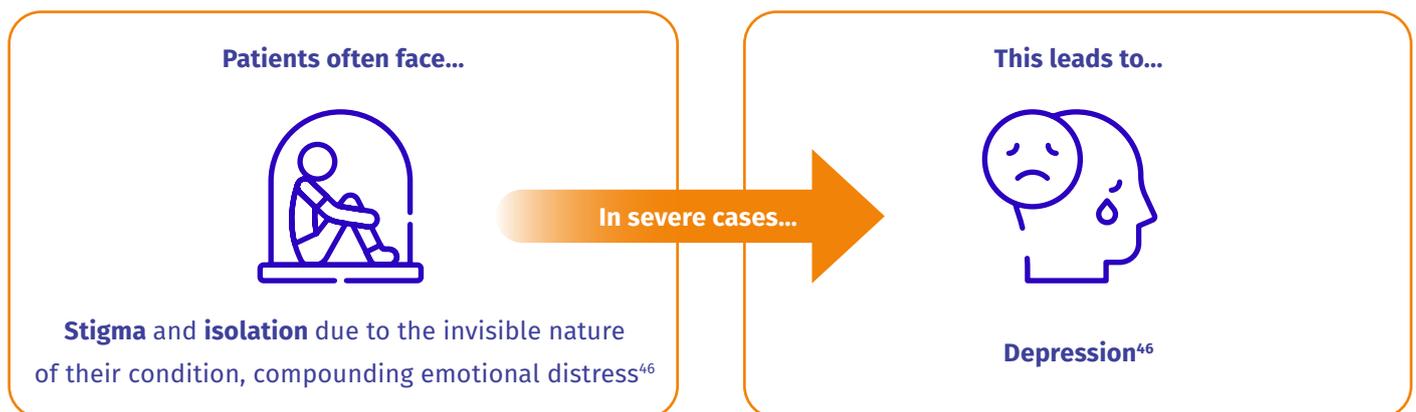


Advanced treatments that reduce costly downstream events, such as emergency room visits, hospitalisations, or long-term disability, can lead to significant savings for payers. From our perspective, investing in CGRP therapies now not only improves patient outcomes but also helps control overall healthcare costs over time, making a compelling case for including CGRP therapies in health insurance coverage⁴⁵.

Hong Kong-Based Private Insurer Representative

3.3 Social impact of CGRP therapies extends beyond the patient

The benefits of CGRP therapies also resonate across social dimensions. Migraine episodes can last for hours or days, disrupting daily routines, professional responsibilities, and personal relationships⁸.



By significantly reducing the frequency and severity of migraine attacks, CGRP therapies help patients regain control over their lives. This restoration of health translates into increased productivity, greater social participation, and an overall improvement in quality of life, benefits that ripple out to families, employers, and communities.



When employees' migraines are well-controlled, workplace productivity improves and absenteeism drops. Effective treatment helps employees stay engaged and reliable, while also boosting overall team morale and creating a more positive work environment²⁵.

Hong Kong-Based Human Resources Expert

3.4 Barriers to access undermine the potential of CGRP therapies in Hong Kong

Despite their clear clinical and economic benefits, CGRP therapies face significant access barriers in Hong Kong. Private insurance plans typically offer zero or partial coverage for migraine treatments and often impose high copayments or require pre-authorisation, delaying patient access to treatment.

In some instances, that are globally common, insurance companies may use a practice known as step therapy, also often referred to as “fail first”⁴⁷. While intended to manage healthcare costs responsibly, this practice can sometimes delay access to optimal care, requiring patients to try alternative treatments that may be less effective or have more side effects.



Patients have to try and fail before we consider approving newer treatments. That's time lost – time when attacks could have been prevented⁴⁵.

Hong Kong-Based Private Insurer Representative

Because insurers have traditionally viewed migraine as a low-risk condition, rarely linked to hospitalisation or mortality, migraine sufferers are disproportionately affected⁴⁵. Consequently, coverage policies tend to be conservative, with many standard health plans in Hong Kong providing limited reimbursement for outpatient migraine care⁴⁵. This leaves patients facing substantial out-of-pocket costs for treatments such as CGRP therapies⁴⁵. These delays in access not only reduce quality of life but may also contribute to increased long-term disability and higher overall healthcare costs.

Encouragingly, some voices within the insurance industry are proposing creative solutions to improve access. For example, one suggestion is to treat chronic migraines as a condition eligible for critical illness or serious disease coverage, which could trigger partial payouts or special benefits when patients meet certain severity criteria⁴⁵. This would be an innovative way to provide financial support for severe migraine sufferers within existing insurance frameworks.

Addressing another critical barrier – healthcare provider awareness and training – is also essential to improving access. Optimising migraine management within primary care, rather than restricting it to specialists, can help ensure broader and more timely access to these innovative treatments, reducing delays in care⁴⁸. Many general practitioners, who are often the first point of contact for migraine patients, currently lack up-to-date knowledge on migraine management and newer therapies^{49,50}. This knowledge gap contributes to under-referral and under-prescription of effective treatments¹⁷. Targeted educational initiatives are therefore crucial to empower healthcare professionals with the confidence and expertise needed to integrate these advances into routine practice effectively.

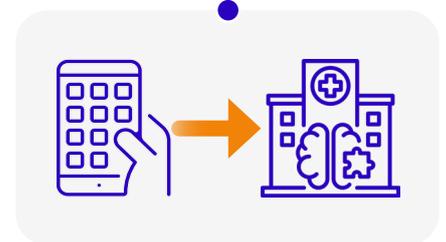
4. Learning from Global Leaders to Expand Access to Migraine Care



Hong Kong has made strides in leveraging public-private partnerships (PPP) to improve migraine care and management. These collaborations bring together the expertise and resources of public institutions, private organisations, and pharmaceutical companies to develop innovative health solutions, enhance disease awareness, and expand access to care.



The CUHK Medical Centre (CUHKMC), FWD Hong Kong, and Pfizer Hong Kong have partnered to raise awareness about migraines and improve public understanding and management of the condition. This initiative includes the development of a health information platform through the FWD MAX lifestyle app, which offers free online migraine assessments and professional follow-up services at CUHKMC's Clinical Neuroscience Centre¹⁶.



The partnership aims to dispel the misconception that migraines are merely severe headaches treatable with over-the-counter painkillers. Instead, it highlights the critical importance of early diagnosis and appropriate treatment to relieve symptoms and decrease the frequency and severity of attacks. Regular updates on migraine causes, symptoms, and treatments will be provided through FWD MAX to promote preventive care and empower patients¹⁶. The initiative reflects a commitment to integrating diverse stakeholders to improve public health education and access to appropriate migraine care.

While there has been commendable progress in Hong Kong through initiatives like this partnership, there is an opportunity to further enhance its impact by learning from global best practices in migraine care and healthcare delivery. Health systems with advanced healthcare systems similar to Hong Kong, have implemented innovative models and strategies that not only improve patient outcomes but also optimise resource utilisation and cost-effectiveness^{51,52,53,54,55}. By adopting and adapting these approaches to the local context, Hong Kong can strengthen efforts to provide comprehensive, timely, and sustainable care for migraine patients. This will ensure that the current successes are scalable and replicable across the country, ultimately benefiting a larger portion of the population.

4.1 Global approaches to scale and provide comprehensive migraine care to the masses

Globally, health systems have implemented policies that improve migraine treatment access by boosting awareness, affordability, and availability. These examples offer valuable lessons for Hong Kong to build a scalable, inclusive migraine care model through coordinated efforts among policymakers, healthcare professionals, and advocacy groups.



Comprehensive Reimbursement of CGRP Therapies in the United Kingdom⁵⁶

The United Kingdom has taken significant strides in migraine management by approving and reimbursing multiple CGRP therapies⁵⁷. These approvals underscore the United Kingdom's commitment to providing a comprehensive range of CGRP-targeted therapies to address the diverse needs of migraine sufferers.

Clinical trials have demonstrated that CGRP therapies significantly reduce migraine frequency and severity⁵⁸, leading to improved quality of life for patients.

The economic implications are substantial⁵⁷:



Workforce Impact:

Effective migraine management reduces absenteeism and enhances productivity, contributing positively to the economy.



Healthcare Cost Savings:

By decreasing the reliance on emergency care and other acute treatments, CGRP therapies alleviate financial pressures on the healthcare system.

(Case study to continue in the next page)



The United Kingdom's comprehensive reimbursement of CGRP therapies highlights key benefits that Hong Kong could also realise:



Equitable Access:

Reimbursing a range of CGRP therapies would provide patients with tailored treatment options, ensuring equitable access to effective migraine care.



Economic Productivity:

As migraines predominantly affect individuals of working age, effective treatment can enhance workforce participation and productivity, yielding economic benefits.



Cost-Effectiveness:

The cost-effectiveness of CGRP therapies aligns with thresholds commonly used to evaluate healthcare investments, reinforcing their viability as reimbursed treatment options in Hong Kong.



Transformative Advocacy in the United Kingdom^{51,59,60}

The Migraine Trust, a leading health and research charity in the United Kingdom, has demonstrated the power of advocacy in reshaping migraine care.

Through consistent engagement with policymakers and health authorities such as The National Institute for Health and Care Excellence, and the Scottish Medicines Consortium, the Trust highlighted barriers to care and inequities in access to these innovative therapies. This advocacy led to widespread media coverage, raising public awareness and creating momentum for systemic change.

The Migraine Trust's efforts also addressed broader policy challenges, such as:



Shortage of general practitioner training on migraines⁶⁰



Lengthy waiting times for specialist care⁶⁰

By collaborating with parliamentarians and other stakeholders, the Trust elevated migraines as a public health priority, inspiring commitments to address these gaps and improve the lives of patients across the United Kingdom⁵¹.

By adopting proven strategies that combine policy reform, advocacy, and innovation, Hong Kong can build an efficient, equitable migraine care system. Collaboration among policymakers, healthcare professionals, and patient groups will be key to closing care gaps and reducing the migraine burden.

4.2 Leveraging innovative insurance models for sustainable migraine care

Expanding access to essential but costly migraine treatments requires innovative insurance models that bridge funding gaps and promote sustainable adoption. Global examples provide valuable lessons on how Hong Kong can address financial barriers while enhancing healthcare access for migraine patients.

Condition-specific insurance plans tailored for chronic diseases offer an effective solution to reduce the financial burden of treatment by providing specialised coverage for medical care, prevention, and patient support. However, as noted, no such insurance plans specifically for migraine currently exist in Hong Kong or much of Asia⁴⁵. Interviews with insurance industry leaders confirmed that migraines have historically been overlooked in product development, with little advocacy within the sector to drive change⁴⁵.



No insurer has yet championed migraine as a distinct insurance focus, but there is significant opportunity to innovate⁴⁵.

Hong Kong-Based Private Insurer Representative

Several experts emphasised potential pathways, including enhancing employer-based group insurance packages to better cover migraine medications or introducing add-on riders specifically for chronic migraine care⁴⁵.



Any new migraine coverage must be developed in close collaboration with medical experts and fully aligned with clinical guidelines. This ensures that coverage decisions, especially around advanced therapies, are evidence-based and accessible to patients who genuinely need them, without unnecessary administrative barriers⁴⁵.

Hong Kong-Based Private Insurer Representative

These insights highlight a clear industry willingness to evolve and an urgent need for collaborative innovation to fill this coverage gap and improve access for migraine sufferers.



Insurers are becoming more open to covering preventive services when there is clear evidence of benefit. Migraines represent a key opportunity for forward-looking insurers to differentiate themselves by offering enhanced benefits to their policyholders¹⁷.

Hong Kong-Based Neurologist



Singapore's Singlife Essential Critical Illness Plan for Diabetes – A Model for Migraine-Specific Insurance⁵³

In Singapore, Singlife's essential critical illness plan has set a benchmark for inclusive insurance solutions tailored to individuals with chronic conditions, such as Type 2 diabetes. Traditionally, pre-existing conditions have been a barrier to obtaining comprehensive coverage, leaving patients vulnerable to financial and health challenges. Singlife's approach redefines this paradigm by offering targeted coverage that includes diabetes-related complications, preventive care, and flexible premiums, ensuring accessibility and improved health outcomes.

This model holds significant implications for managing other chronic and underserved conditions, such as migraines. Migraines affect millions worldwide, particularly individuals of working age, leading to absenteeism, reduced productivity, and significant healthcare costs. Despite their debilitating impact, most insurance policies exclude migraine treatments, forcing patients to bear high out-of-pocket costs for advanced therapies like CGRP therapies.

Inspired by Singlife's success, developing migraine-specific insurance policies in Hong Kong could bridge this gap. Such policies would provide comprehensive coverage for advanced treatments, preventive care, and holistic management, including mental health support.

By focusing on affordability and accessibility, these plans could:



Empower patients



Reduce the societal burden of migraines



Promote early intervention to prevent progression to chronic conditions

Digital-integrated insurance plans represent another promising avenue for improving access and early intervention. In Hong Kong, the FWD MAX lifestyle app already integrates health-related services, offering a foundation for further development⁶¹. Expanding this platform to include migraine-specific features - such as symptom-tracking apps, wearable devices, or telemedicine consultations - could provide patients with personalised care and timely interventions, ultimately improving outcomes.



China serves as a leading example of leveraging digital ecosystems in insurance

Ping An, through platforms like Ping An Good Doctor, combines telemedicine, medication delivery, and Artificial Intelligence (AI)-powered symptom tracking to provide comprehensive patient support⁶². Additionally, Ping An Smart Healthcare utilises AI- assisted diagnostics to improve clinical efficiency, while HealthKonnnect employs big data analytics to optimise resource allocation^{62,63}.

These integrated solutions not only enhance care delivery but also foster stronger relationships between insurers and policyholders by bridging gaps between healthcare services and insurance coverage.

Adapting these innovative insurance models to the Hong Kong context could significantly improve access to migraine care. Tailored insurance plans that cover advanced treatments and preventive services, combined with technology-driven solutions, can help reduce financial barriers and encourage early intervention.

When paired with public awareness campaigns and supportive healthcare policies, these insurance initiatives can pave the way for a more equitable, efficient, and patient-centred healthcare system.



Insurance innovation alone isn't enough, education for both patients and providers is critical. Patients must know their treatment options, and doctors need to be proactive in using new therapies. A coordinated effort to educate and engage both sides ensures that expanded coverage truly leads to better care on the ground³².

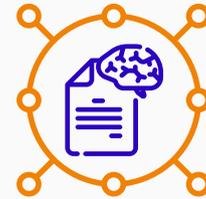
Hong Kong-Based Academic Researcher in Neurology

The following examples from Denmark and Taiwan also demonstrate how better general practitioner training and public education can lead to better migraine control at the population level.



Denmark's health system prioritises empowering general practitioners with specialised migraine training through programs led by the Danish Headache Centre, a national reference hub.

By educating frontline providers – including general practitioners and physiotherapists – this approach enables early preventive treatment and reduces specialist dependence. This proactive model has significantly improved patient outcomes by tackling migraines before they become chronic⁵⁴.



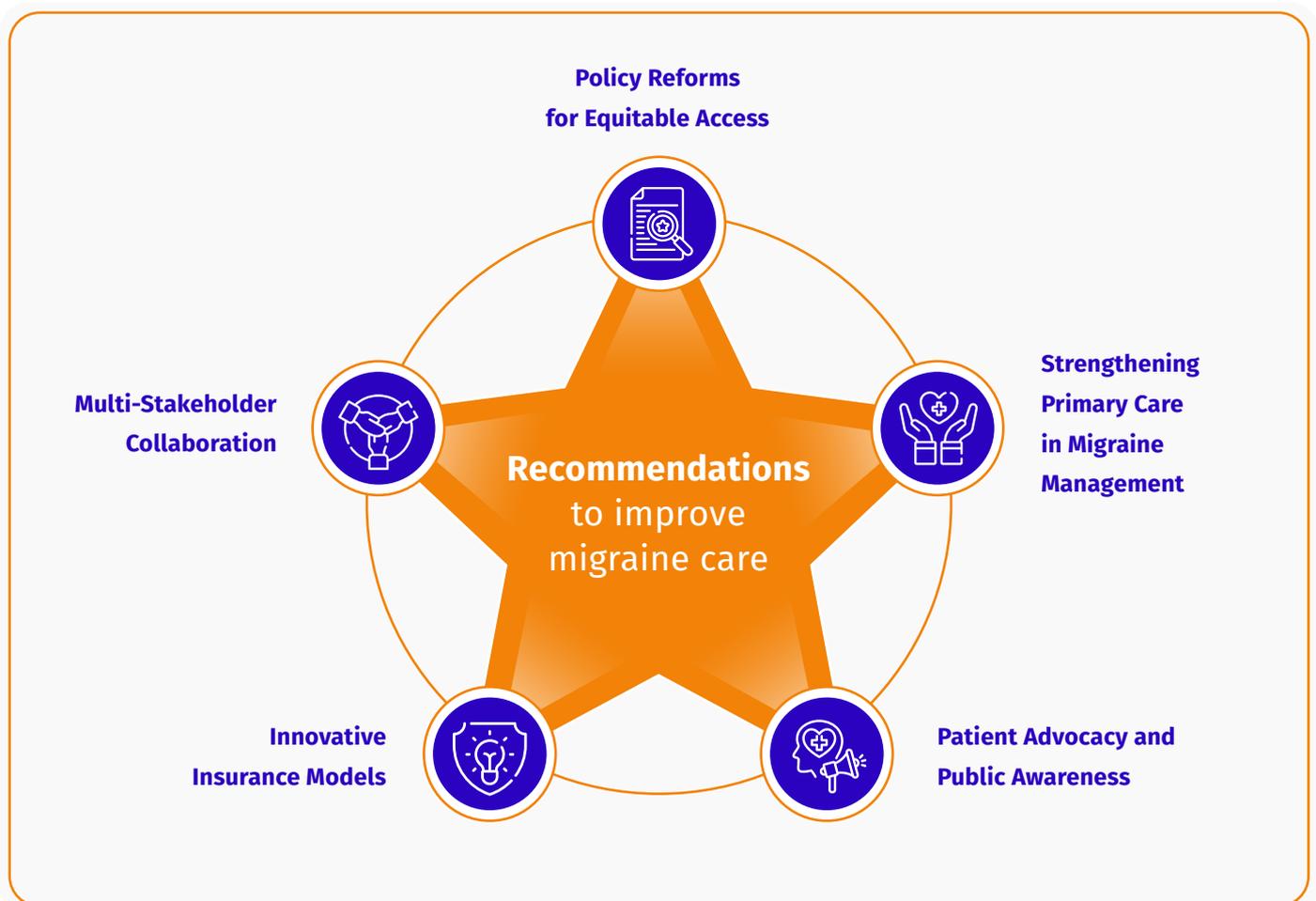
In Taiwan, health authorities have also developed and disseminated public migraine management guidelines and educational materials for both doctors and patients, significantly improving overall awareness and standardising care practices⁵⁵.

Overall, advancing meaningful improvements in migraine care requires a holistic, multi-stakeholder approach – integrating expanded coverage, awareness, and proactive healthcare engagement from healthcare providers, including primary care physicians, neurologists, and headache specialists.



5. Recommendations for Improving Access to Advanced Migraine Care

Improving migraine care in Hong Kong requires coordinated multisectoral efforts. The recommendations outlined in this section highlight a clear direction on how to advance migraine care through practical, targeted actions. Each area addresses a key gap in the current system, from policy reform and primary care capacity to insurance innovation and public engagement.



The table in the next two pages outline the desired outcomes, the steps needed to get there, and the stakeholders best positioned to drive each change forward. Together, these actions can help reduce treatment barriers, improve access to advanced therapies, and build more sustainable, patient-centred care for those living with migraine in Hong Kong.

RECOMMENDATION AREA	VISION / GOAL WITH KEY ACTIONS REQUIRED	RESPONSIBLE STAKEHOLDERS
 <p>Policy Reforms for Equitable Access</p>	<p>Advanced migraine treatments (e.g. CGRP therapies) should be affordable and accessible to all patients, regardless of income, through supportive health policies and funding mechanisms.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▶ Implement targeted reimbursement policies to cover advanced migraine therapies in public and private healthcare plans, reducing out-of-pocket costs for patients. ▶ Integrate advanced treatments into insurance schemes (e.g. Hospital Authority formulary and private insurance coverage) to eliminate financial barriers. ▶ Align coverage criteria with clinical best practices, ensuring that reimbursement for migraine treatments is guided by evidence-based guidelines and expert consensus. 	<p>Government health authorities (Health Bureau, Hospital Authority)</p> <p>Private insurance providers</p>
 <p>Strengthening Primary Care in Migraine Management</p>	<p>Empower primary care providers to be first-line managers of migraines, easing specialist bottlenecks and expanding patients' access to timely treatment.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▶ Provide specialised training and guidelines for general practitioners to diagnose and manage migraines, including prescribing advanced therapies. ▶ Encourage general practitioners to prescribe newer migraine medications (such as CGRP therapies) where appropriate, supported by clear protocols. ▶ Embed migraine care into primary care practice via continued medical education, mentoring from neurologists, and inclusion of migraine management in standard primary care guidelines. ▶ Strengthen tiered referral system to standardise migraine care pathways 	<p>Medical societies</p> <p>General practitioner associations</p> <p>Specialist clinicians (for training support)</p>
 <p>Patient Advocacy and Public Awareness</p>	<p>Establish an active migraine patient advocacy presence to advocate for better public awareness, leading to reduced stigma, earlier intervention, and stronger support for migraine as a serious health issue.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▶ Establish and support migraine patient advocacy groups to represent patients in policy discussions and public forums, giving migraine sufferers a collective voice. ▶ Launch public awareness campaigns (through media, schools, and community outreach) to dispel misconceptions and highlight migraines as a legitimate, serious medical condition requiring proper treatment. ▶ Implement workplace education programmes to reduce stigma, encourage employees to seek help, and guide employers on supporting staff with migraine (e.g. flexible policies, healthcare support). 	<p>Patient volunteers and health NGOs</p> <p>Public health agencies (for awareness initiatives)</p> <p>Employers and HR organisations</p>

(Recommendation Table to continue in the next page)

RECOMMENDATION AREA	VISION / GOAL WITH KEY ACTIONS REQUIRED	RESPONSIBLE STAKEHOLDERS
 <p>Innovative Insurance Models</p>	<p>Ensure that private insurance coverage gaps for migraines are closed through creative insurance solutions and tech integration, ensuring patients can afford advanced treatments and receive holistic care support.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▶ Develop new insurance products or riders that include advanced migraine therapies, so that individuals and employers can opt into coverage for cutting-edge treatments. ▶ Enhance group health plans by adding migraine benefits (e.g. covering neurologist visits, preventive medications like CGRP therapies) in employer-based insurance schemes. ▶ Leverage digital health tools within insurance plans (e.g. migraine tracking apps, telemedicine consultations, AI-driven health analytics) to monitor patient progress and enable timely interventions as part of coverage benefits. 	<p>Insurance companies</p> <p>Employer benefit plan administrators</p> <p>Government insurance regulators (to provide incentives and supportive regulations)</p> <p>Healthcare professionals (to advise on clinically sound coverage criteria)</p> <p>Digital health solution providers</p>
 <p>Multi-Stakeholder Collaboration</p>	<p>Create a collaborative migraine care ecosystem, where policymakers, healthcare providers, insurers, employers, and patient advocates work in unison to improve migraine outcomes and sustain innovations.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▶ Establish formal multi-stakeholder working groups or committees to coordinate migraine care initiatives – bringing together health officials, clinicians, insurers, employers, and patient representatives to plan and implement improvements collectively ▶ Create public-private partnerships to fund and support innovative migraine services (e.g. specialty clinics, telehealth programs), ensuring new solutions are scalable and sustainable long-term. ▶ Facilitate data sharing and co-created programmes (e.g. partnerships between insurers, providers, and tech firms) to track treatment outcomes and develop patient support programs, continually refining the migraine care approach through shared insights. ▶ Enhance research and data infrastructure to support population-based migraine registries to track migraine prevalence, treatment patterns, and real-world outcomes. ▶ Partner with medical centres in joint migraine management across the Greater Bay Area 	<p>Government health authorities (Health Bureau, Hospital Authority)</p> <p>Healthcare providers (neurologists, general practitioners)</p> <p>Insurance sector</p> <p>Employers and business chambers</p> <p>Patient advocacy groups</p> <p>Academic and research institutions (for data analysis and guidance)</p>

This multi-faceted strategy addresses the issue from all angles – policy, clinical practice, public perception, financial access, and cross-sector alignment – ensuring that improvements in migraine care are comprehensive and self-sustaining. By pursuing these coordinated recommendations, Hong Kong can build a future in which migraine patients receive timely relief through advanced treatments, suffer less stigma, and enjoy the full support of a healthcare system tailored to their needs.

6. Building a Future with Better Migraine Care

This white paper highlights the important opportunity for Hong Kong to enhance its approach to migraine care in response to the growing personal and societal impact of this condition. While migraines continue to affect a significant portion of the population, challenges remain around timely access to effective treatments, awareness, and coordinated care. Advances in migraine therapies, supported by strong clinical evidence and demonstrated economic value, offer promising pathways to improve patient outcomes and support the healthcare system sustainably.

Input from clinicians, insurers, employers, and academic experts underscores a shared recognition of the need for continued progress. Their insights complement the evidence presented here, reinforcing the value of expanding access to innovative treatments and integrating comprehensive migraine management into existing healthcare frameworks.

For policymakers, payers, and healthcare providers, this represents an opportunity to build on Hong Kong's strengths by refining reimbursement policies, strengthening primary care capacity, and fostering broader awareness. Addressing migraine in a holistic manner can improve quality of life for patients, reduce indirect costs associated with lost productivity, and optimize resource use within the health system.

Meaningful advancement will depend on ongoing collaboration across sectors. Policymakers, healthcare professionals, insurers, and community stakeholders each have a vital role in developing sustainable, patient-centred solutions. Through coordinated efforts – grounded in evidence and tailored to Hong Kong's unique context – there is great potential to deliver more accessible, effective, and equitable migraine care.

This white paper serves as an invitation to unite around these goals, encouraging thoughtful dialogue, innovative policy, and continued engagement with all relevant stakeholders. By working together, Hong Kong can foster a healthcare environment where individuals living with migraines receive the care and support they need, ultimately contributing to a healthier, more productive society.



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