



ADVANCING PRECISION & ACCESS

in HER2-Positive Breast Cancer Care in South Korea

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

South Korea has one of the world's most advanced and equitable systems for HER2-positive breast cancer care. With near-universal screening, standardized biomarker testing, and publicly funded access to the latest HER2-targeted therapies, Korean patients experience survival rates among the highest globally.

Yet regional gaps in specialist access, delays in integrating new technologies, and limited real-world HER2 subtype data still create challenges.

INTRODUCTION

South Korea has achieved remarkable success in breast cancer control, combining national cancer screening, cutting-edge diagnostics, and universal health coverage. With approximately 22,000 new breast cancer cases annually, HER2-positive disease constitutes a major clinical priority. Over the past decade, the integration of dual HER2 blockade and antibody-drug conjugates has transformed outcomes.

South Korea has responded with timely reimbursement and rapid clinical guideline updates. However, geographical access and HER2-low readiness require urgent attention. Korea's strengths in digital health and biotech position it to lead the next phase of personalized oncology — if it accelerates equitable, nationwide implementation.

CURRENT FRAMEWORK/SITUATION

Korea's National Health Insurance covers 95% of cancer-related costs, enabling access to HER2 therapies like trastuzumab, pertuzumab, T-DM1, and trastuzumab deruxtecan. HER2 testing is standardized, and over 90% of women live within reach of a certified cancer center. Screening rates exceed 70%, and 5-year breast cancer survival is >93%. However, access to NGS and HER2-low diagnostics remains concentrated in urban hubs. Public education about HER2 subtypes is minimal, and while Korea participates in global trials, real-world HER2-stratified survival data are still limited. As Korea enters a new era of subtype-specific oncology, the policy focus must shift from availability to equity and speed.

South Korea is ranked as **"Advanced"** under the global Maturity Framework for Cancer Care—but with growing HER2-low classifications and rapidly evolving therapies, the system must now move from operational excellence to adaptive innovation.

HER2 BREAST CANCER IN SOUTH KOREA

Key Issues Table and Policy Recommendations

Pillar	Fact	Barrier	Policy Recommendations
Infrastructure	Yes, Korea has a strong network of cancer centers with standardized HER2 testing...	...but rural hospitals lack NGS and often refer patients to large urban centers for advanced diagnostics.	Equip regional hospitals with HER2-low testing capacity and expand telepathology networks.
Access to Treatment	Yes, all HER2-targeted therapies are reimbursed under national health insurance...	...but awareness of new options (e.g. T-DXd, HER2-low) among community oncologists varies.	Launch provider education programs on HER2-low pathways and novel HER2 treatments.
Research & Innovation	Yes, Korea leads HER2 research and contributes to major global trials...	...but funding for translational and HER2-low-specific trials is still limited.	Prioritize HER2-low trials and resistance mechanism studies in national R&D grants.
Awareness & Education	Yes, campaigns like Pink Run and Pink Glove have boosted breast health awareness...	...but HER2-specific education is lacking and subpopulation outreach (e.g. migrants, elderly) is limited.	Introduce HER2-focused public campaigns and multilingual awareness toolkits.
Survival Rates	Yes, breast cancer survival exceeds 93% nationally...	...but HER2-stratified survival data are not reported in national cancer statistics.	Require HER2-positive and HER2-low outcomes reporting in Korea Central Cancer Registry.
Early Detection & Palliative Care	Yes, biennial mammography is free or low-cost and hospice access is expanding...	...but only 24% of terminal patients use hospice care, and rural uptake remains low.	Expand home-based palliative care programs and public education on hospice options.
Biomarker	Yes, over 95% of patients receive HER2 testing at diagnosis and relapse...	...but HER2-low reproducibility remains a concern due to test variability.	Standardize HER2-low IHC/FISH interpretation and ensure lab-level quality monitoring.
Clinical Guidelines	Yes, Korea's HER2+ guidelines mirror NCCN/ESMO and are regularly updated...	...but implementation varies between urban and community settings.	Tie reimbursement incentives to HER2+ protocol adherence and re-testing compliance.
Reimbursement	Yes, Korea's value-based system reimburses nearly all HER2 therapies...	...but approval-to-access lag for new drugs remains 1-2 years despite RSAs.	Streamline pharmacoeconomic review for cancer therapies with demonstrated OS benefit.
Screening	Yes, national mammography coverage exceeds 70% with strong performance metrics...	...but gaps persist in older women and underserved groups.	Extend outreach using mobile units and digital reminders for women 70+ and low-income populations.

CONCLUSION

South Korea has built one of the world's most effective HER2-positive breast cancer systems. But as HER2 classifications evolve and therapeutic options multiply, the health system must evolve with them. Urban-rural gaps, delayed HER2-low integration, and underuse of hospice care point to structural bottlenecks in an otherwise high-performing system. With a strong regulatory and digital infrastructure, Korea can rapidly close these gaps—ensuring every patient, regardless of subtype or location, benefits from the next generation of HER2-targeted precision medicine.



KEY POLICY MESSAGES

- 1 Korea's HER2+ care is globally strong—but HER2-low implementation and rural equity are the new frontiers.
- 2 Diagnostic quality must match therapeutic innovation—HER2-low accuracy matters.
- 3 Rapid translation from trial to treatment must be supported by faster access mechanisms.
- 4 Subtype-stratified data must inform planning and resource allocation.

CALL TO ACTION

- **Fund HER2-low research** and mandate HER2-low testing quality assurance in pathology labs.
- **Expand access to NGS and HER2 diagnostics** in regional hospitals using telepathology and mobile platforms.
- **Launch HER2-specific provider and public education** to improve uptake of new diagnostics and therapies.
- **Accelerate reimbursement decisions** for HER2-targeted drugs with proven survival benefit through fast-track HTA.
- **Report HER2-specific outcomes** in national registries to inform continuous improvement in care delivery.