

Primary Health Care Performance Initiative

MEASUREMENT + LEARNING + IMPROVEMENT

The Primary Health Care Performance Initiative (PHCPI) seeks to help low- and middle-income countries build high-performing primary health care systems through better performance measurement and knowledge-sharing.

The Primary Health Care Performance Initiative will help countries achieve the health-related Sustainable Development Goals by catalyzing improvements in primary health care systems through better measurement, knowledge-sharing of best practices, and practical tools to manage and improve delivery of essential health services.

Inspiration for PHCPI

The last five decades have seen great improvements in the health of populations worldwide. Yet too many women still die in childbirth, too many children under five die from largely preventable causes, and too many adults die from treatable infectious and non-communicable diseases.

In September 2015, the launch of new Sustainable Development Goals will reiterate the world's commitment to improving these health outcomes. High-performing primary health care systems are central to reaching global and country-specific goals, achieving universal health coverage, and advancing gains against infectious diseases, maternal and child morbidity and mortality, and non-communicable illnesses.

Primary health care is the front line of health - it's where people go in their communities for basic, essential health services like vaccinations, maternal and newborn care, and family planning. Good primary health care also helps patients manage chronic diseases, which helps prevent these illnesses from becoming serious conditions and avoids unnecessary hospitalizations and time away from family and work. Primary health care workers form the early warning system for detecting and stopping disease outbreaks before they become deadly epidemics - they distinguish communities susceptible to disease from those resilient to disease.



Photo by Maggie Hallahan, Sumitomo Chemical

All too often, primary health care is the weakest link in the health system. Ebola was a major wake-up call, yet just one example of the problem: primary health care receives too little attention and funding in national health plans and donor budgets.

Spurring Primary Health Care Improvement

To improve primary health care, countries first need better information about the components of high-performing systems. Money alone is not the answer - countries that spend more on health workers, clinics and medicines do not necessarily have healthier populations. Understanding the multiple aspects of primary health care performance will help identify what investments and policies deliver the best and most efficient care meeting the needs of communities.

PHCPI will advance more comprehensive measurement of primary health care systems to enhance transparency and accountability. The initiative will help countries diagnose underlying system challenges and ultimately improve primary health care systems based on experiences of high-performing countries across income levels. The initiative will empower countries with the partnerships and technical support needed to transform their primary health care systems in a sustainable manner.

The Initiative Will Focus on Four Areas of Work

STRENGTHEN PERFORMANCE MEASUREMENT:

The initiative will leverage existing and emerging data on performance of primary health care systems to report on differences across countries, promote accountability and guide improvement. Data will focus on what systems look like from the perspective of people, what actually happens in health facilities and community health programs, how experiences vary across countries and regions, and what this tells us about how policymakers and managers can achieve effective coverage and improve health outcomes.

CATALYZE KNOWLEDGE GENERATION:

The initiative will synthesize existing data on effective primary health care delivery models in low- and middle-income countries and generate new knowledge based on experiences of countries with high-performing primary health care systems. It will identify drivers of performance and document best practices for countries to improve their primary health care systems.

PROMOTE COUNTRY-LEVEL IMPROVEMENT:

PHCPI will translate global knowledge into practical tools for primary health care system diagnosis and improvement. The initiative will support countries' improvement work through a network of countries that facilitates peer-to-peer learning, and will equip countries to effectively interpret and act on primary health care performance data.

ENGAGE PARTNERS TO BUILD MOMENTUM:

PHCPI will bring together a network of country policymakers, advocates and other development partners who are committed to increasing the focus on primary health care systems and supporting countries' improvement efforts. Working together, we will draw attention to primary health care to create an impetus for improvement.

As a first step, the initiative will launch a website called "PHC Vital Signs," a digital platform for countries to share best practices and use data to improve their primary health care systems.

Unpacking the "Black Box"

Countries currently do not have a complete understanding of what makes a primary health care system work.

For example, policymakers typically have access to data on the total number and density of health workers in their countries—commonly measured and important statistics. However, policymakers often are not aware of other critical factors about health workers: what they do during a typical work-day; their skill and level of knowledge; their compensation and satisfaction; and how well they diagnose and treat patients and coordinate care with other health workers. Countries do not systematically assess the experience of patients, staff, and communities accessing health services, or the perspectives of those who do not interact with the public system at all.

Existing research points to the importance of these service delivery processes in converting inputs into desired outcomes, but the lack of knowledge about how best to improve these processes has led them to be known as the "Black Box" of primary health care. Without this information, countries and their development partners will have limited understanding of where change is needed.

PHCPI seeks to build on existing data and generate new data where needed to unpack the "Black Box" and help countries focus on how to improve the performance of their primary health care systems.

PHCPI PARTNERS

PHCPI is currently led by the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation, the World Bank Group, the World Health Organization, Ariadne Labs, and Results for Development. We are building a network of country policymakers, advocates and other development partners to move the initiative forward.

To learn more, please contact: PHCPI@r4d.org.