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Accelerating electrification of health-care facilities through decentralized renewable energies

Reliable electricity is fundamental to the provision of health services – from lighting to illuminate a midwife’s work guiding childbirth, to enabling nurses and clinicians to correctly diagnose and respond to emergency conditions. Critical and life-saving medical devices need reliable electricity, including spotlights, suction units, oxygen concentrators, baby warmers, vaccines refrigerators, to name a few. Electricity is also essential to ensure basic amenities, such as lighting, clean water supply, adequate ventilation, space heating and cooling, and communication as well as to enable telemedicine and remote care. Electricity access in rural and remote areas also increases the sense of safety and security for patients and staff at night.

Facts

- Reliable electricity is a major enabler of **universal health coverage**.
- Close to **1 billion¹** people in low- and lower-middle-income countries are estimated to be served by health-care facilities without reliable electricity or with no electricity access at all.
- In low- and lower-middle-income countries of South Asia and sub-Saharan Africa, approximately **12% and 15%** of health-care facilities, respectively, have no access to electricity.¹
- In sub-Saharan Africa, **only half** of hospitals have access to reliable electricity.
- There is a sharp **urban–rural divide**. The energy access challenge is higher for health-care facilities in remote and rural areas.
- Electricity is needed to power critical and life-saving medical devices as well as basic services such as lighting, clean water supply and communication.

Key messages

- Powering health-care facilities through decentralized renewable energy systems is a concrete action to provide them with reliable, cost effective and clean electricity in a timely manner.
- Delaying electrification means denying access to life-saving health services. There is no time - and no need - to “wait for the grid”.
- Decentralized renewable energy systems increase the climate resilience of health-care facilities and their energy autonomy, making them independent from the diesel supply needed for generators.
- Operation and maintenance of decentralized energy systems is key. The “install and forget” approach to electrification needs to be transformed into “install and maintain”.
- Building the capacity of local stakeholders is key to the long-term functionality of energy systems.
- Electrification of health-care facilities must be considered a development priority. Support, financing and investments must be scaled up accordingly.
- Precise and holistic health–energy needs assessments are critical for effective electrification plans.
- Electricity access initiatives need to be complemented by investments aiming to provide health-care facilities with the necessary medical devices and equipment.
- Improved coordination is needed between relevant stakeholders at the global and local levels.
- Data collection, analysis, accessibility and sharing need to be improved.
- Political commitment, awareness and advocacy are critical to generating local action.





Priority areas – Health and Energy Platform of Action (HEPA)

Recognizing how essential access to clean and sustainable energy is and to enhance cross-sectoral cooperation, WHO with UNDP, UN DESA and World Bank and the strong support of the International Renewable Energy Agency, established the Health and Energy Platform of Action.

HEPA aims to accelerate universal access to clean and sustainable energy to protect health by mobilising political commitment, promoting the development of global or country implementation roadmaps, demonstrating leadership, conducting advocacy and outreach at high-level international engagements, and promoting an interdisciplinary approach.

A Strategic Roadmap to promote healthier populations through clean and sustainable energy was endorsed by the High-Level Coalition on Health and Energy in the framework of HEPA in June 2022. The roadmap identifies the following priorities:

- 1** Making sure that clean cooking and access to electricity in health-care facilities are considered as two development priorities essential to protect public health;
- 2** Dramatically increasing public and private investments in electrifying health-care facilities and in clean cooking;
- 3** Providing the necessary human and financial resources to design and implement clean energy plans and sustainable delivery models tailored to the needs of health sector and households;
- 4** Developing tailored policy and financing schemes, able to unlock the potential of clean and sustainable energy solutions and to address the health sector needs;
- 5** Increasing cooperation between the energy and health sectors and collaboration with all relevant stakeholders; and
- 6** Facilitating collaboration between private, public, and non-governmental actors.

Resources

- HEPA Platform: <https://www.who.int/initiatives/health-and-energy-platform-of-action>
- Video HEPA Health-Care Facility Electrification: <https://www.who.int/multi-media/details/hepa-accelerating-access-to-electricity-in-health-care-facilities>
- Report - Energizing health: accelerating electricity access in health-care facilities: <https://www.who.int/publications/i/item/9789240066960>

Footnotes

- 1** WHO, the World Bank, SEforALL & IRENA (2023): Energizing health: accelerating electricity access in health-care facilities. Geneva



HEALTH AND ENERGY PLATFORM OF ACTION (HEPA)

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