

AFGHANISTAN

People in need of health assistance¹

14.3 MILLION

People targeted for health assistance¹

9.3 MILLION

Funding requirement

US\$ 126.7 MILLION

¹ **Source:** Humanitarian Response Plan for Afghanistan 2025

CONTEXT

Afghanistan is enduring a severe humanitarian crisis resulting from decades of war and internal conflict that have left its health system fragmented and under-resourced. The country faces a complex array of challenges, including an influx of returnees, widespread population displacement, drought, food insecurity, multiple disease outbreaks and the lingering impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic. These factors have compounded existing public health issues, creating a dire situation for millions of Afghans.

The involuntary return of refugees from neighbouring Pakistan and the Islamic Republic of Iran has further intensified the crisis. Many returning individuals reside in remote and mountainous regions that have not received humanitarian aid for years. According to a geospatial analysis conducted by WHO in August 2024, around 14.5 million people (33% of the total population) across 34 provinces live in areas where primary health care cannot be accessed within a one-hour walk. This lack of access leaves Afghan citizens vulnerable to food scarcity and malnutrition, exacerbated by the burden of both communicable and non-communicable diseases.

The crisis disproportionately affects Afghan women and children, who face heightened vulnerability due to restricted access to education and economic opportunities. In 2024, an estimated 23.7 million people required urgent assistance, up from 18.4 million in August 2021. In 2025, 14.3 million are projected to need health assistance. Alarming, every day 24 mothers die from preventable causes, and 167 infants succumb to similar conditions. Approximately 14.5 million people living across 21 570 villages lack or have insufficient access to basic health services, with severe consequences for reproductive, maternal, newborn, and child health.

Food insecurity remains one of Afghanistan's most pressing issues, affecting 14.2 million people. This situation has worsened due to three consecutive years of drought, resulting in severe water scarcity in 30 of the country's 34 provinces. The percentage of food-insecure individuals has skyrocketed from 10% in 2020 to an alarming 67% in 2023.

Amid these challenges, Afghanistan's health sector struggles with increasing demands and severe underfunding. In 2024, the closure of 200 static and mobile health facilities affected more than 2 million people, including over 400 000 children under five and 160 000 pregnant or lactating women. Geopolitical tensions and declining international support compound the crisis, highlighting the urgent need for comprehensive humanitarian assistance to meet the Afghan population's overwhelming needs.



Field photos from Khushkak village, Afghanistan.
Photo credit: WHO / Zakarya Safari

WHO'S STRATEGIC OBJECTIVES

- 1. Reaching the unreached and prioritizing women's and children's health:** Implement a “for women, by women, with women” approach, expanding coverage and enhancing the quality of health service delivery, particularly in underserved areas, and sustaining polio eradication efforts and increasing immunization coverage.
- 2. Protecting people by scaling up responses to ongoing emergencies and emerging health needs:** Strengthen disease prevention, preparedness and response, and enhance the health information management system.
- 3. Coordinating the health sector for maximum impact:** Address health-related humanitarian needs at both national and subnational levels through the donor/partner coordinating forum, Health Cluster, and other coordination mechanisms.

OPERATIONAL PRESENCE

WHO Afghanistan maintains an operational presence in all 34 provinces, ensuring easy access to project sites. This extensive reach is supported by seven regional and subnational structures, along with the Kabul-based head office, employing a total of 1276 national and international staff.

WORKING WITH PARTNERS

WHO Afghanistan leads the health cluster, maintaining strong relationships with all health partners, particularly those providing emergency health care services in the country. The national and provincial-level health cluster meetings serve not only as platforms to identify and coordinate the needs of the population, but also as vital forums for health partners to align their activities and prevent duplication of efforts. Currently, there are 57 health cluster operational partners (four UN organizations, 22 international NGOs and 31 national NGOs).



WHO Afghanistan launched a targeted risk communication and community engagement campaign in June 2024.
Photo credit: WHO

WHO 2025 RESPONSE STRATEGY

The WHO Afghanistan country office will continue to provide effective leadership and coordination of the health sector in response to health-related humanitarian needs in Afghanistan, both at national and subnational levels. Given that Afghanistan remains one of the most complex humanitarian emergencies in the world, robust leadership and coordination of health sector activities are paramount. Collaboration among critical stakeholders is essential for an effective health response in this uniquely challenging and fragmented context. As the directing and coordinating authority for health within the United Nations system in Afghanistan, WHO is committed to facilitating the efficient use of trusted resources and effective interventions aimed at reducing disability, morbidity and mortality among beneficiaries.

Aligned with the expectations of our partners and the 2023-2025 Health Sector Transition Strategy (HSTS), WHO will work collaboratively with partners to address critical health emergencies. This includes a strong focus on providing life-saving health interventions, recognizing the urgency and importance of these actions. We will build on the achievements and lessons learned from 2024 to enhance health outcomes for the Afghan population.

WHO's role in Afghanistan is multifaceted, addressing various spheres of intervention. In the context of the ongoing humanitarian crisis, WHO focuses on providing strategic leadership, health information, technical expertise and, most importantly, operational interventions at the provincial level. This approach ensures the functionality of basic health systems and the continuous delivery of essential and life-saving services for all. WHO maintains a presence across all regions of the country.

Every morning as I head to my duty, my hope is to do more to help the people of Afghanistan and ensure that everyone can access the health care they need. Working as a paramedic here is not without challenges, but I've faced every obstacle with determination and an unwavering commitment to my work. I carry out my role with passion and the belief that every life I touch makes a difference.

Mr. Shakeel Alokozai, member of the WHO-supported surveillance team in Herat



With the help of community health workers, WHO is supporting the national malaria control programme to raise awareness of the enduring public health problems.
Photo credit: WHO / Zakarya Safari



WHO Afghanistan launched a targeted risk communication and community engagement (RCCE) campaign to conduct mass awareness activities. Photo credit: WHO

KEY ACTIVITIES FOR 2025

- **Expand access to essential health services** to address critical gaps and meet the urgent health needs of vulnerable populations.
- **Strengthen nutritional surveillance and treatment systems** to ensure timely identification and response to the current peak in malnutrition, enabling early, targeted interventions.
- **Enhance access to comprehensive mental health and psychosocial support services**, alongside care for noncommunicable diseases and substance use disorders, particularly for underserved and at-risk groups.
- **Support technical coordination and capacity-building** across primary, secondary, and tertiary health care, prioritizing life-saving reproductive, maternal, newborn, and child health care, as well as injuries and trauma care services.
- **Bolster outbreak response capacity**, including improved early warning systems for detecting and managing infectious disease outbreaks.
- **Expand and upgrade emergency and trauma care services**, incorporating mass casualty preparedness and response to ensure timely, life-saving interventions.
- **Ensure rapid outbreak preparedness and response**, minimizing the impact of infectious diseases through proactive measures.
- **Provide effective leadership and coordination of the health sector**, aligning resources and efforts to address the humanitarian health needs comprehensively.

As Japan's ambassador to Afghanistan, it's imperative for us to witness firsthand the challenges and successes in the health care sector. By collaborating with organizations like WHO, we strive to ensure that every Afghan has access to essential medical services.

His Excellency Mr. Takayoshi Kuromiya, Ambassador of Japan to Afghanistan

WHO'S IMPACT IN 2024

Delivering supplies to flood-hit communities in Afghanistan



Welfare Organization for Rehabilitation, Livelihood & Development (WORLD) provides health services in Berbori Sub Health Center in Dour Baba District of Nangarhar Province. Photo credit: WHO / Zakarya Safari

12 May 2024, Kabul, Afghanistan – WHO Afghanistan has swiftly responded to the flooding crisis in northern Afghanistan by delivering 7 metric tonnes of essential medicines, medical supplies, and kits.

Heavy rainfall affected more than 2000 homes across 8 districts, leaving hundreds of people homeless or trapped in their homes beneath debris and mud. The death toll currently stands at 300. With more than 100 people injured and a significant number of people missing, the death toll may increase significantly over the coming days.

“We extend our condolences to the families of the victims and are joining efforts with the health authorities and partners to maintain access to essential health services in the affected areas,” said Dr Jamshed Tanoli, acting WHO Representative to Afghanistan. “Our teams and cluster partners are on the ground now, working tirelessly to alleviate the suffering of the people in the flooded areas.”

Prior to this latest shipment, WHO had already provided 46 kits with enough medication for pneumonia, acute watery diarrhea and malnutrition to treat about 20 000 people, plus supplies for 500 trauma cases. WHO also immediately deployed surveillance support teams and other personnel to assist in various aspects of the flood response.

Several health facilities remain non-operational, making it difficult for people to access essential health services. The full extent of the damage caused by the floods is still being assessed, and WHO and the local health authorities are closely monitoring the situation. They are also working together to put in place preventive measures to curb the potential spread of waterborne diseases, such as diarrhoea. Other efforts are also under way to provide safe drinking water, distribute hygiene kits and offer medical treatment to mitigate the public health impacts of the disaster.

FOR MORE INFORMATION

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Welfare Organization for Rehabilitation, Livelihood & Development (WORLD) provides health services in Berbori Sub Health Center in Dour Baba District of Nangarhar Province. Photo credit: WHO / Zakarya Safari

KEY ACHIEVEMENTS FOR 2024

In 2024, WHO Afghanistan achieved significant milestones in strengthening healthcare services across the country, including:

- **Led, directed and coordinated more than 60 health cluster partners** to ensure timely, effective and predictable health responses reaching over 8.4 million people.
- **Distributed 3240 trauma and emergency surgical kits** to strengthen health care delivery.
- **Provided support to 235 primary health care centers (PHCs)**, 17 hospitals, 28 laboratories (including CPHLs), 5 acute mental health wards, 177 trauma care centers, 65 blood banks, 12 drug and addiction treatment centers (DATCs), and 2 opioid substitution therapy (OST) facilities.
- **Facilitated 2 028 494 outpatient department (OPD) visits**, including 1 170 793 at PHCs, 725 407 in hospitals, and 132 294 at trauma care centers.
- **Detected and responded to 1469 outbreak alerts**, with 97% (1427 alerts) addressed within 24–48 hours.
- **Distributed 3311 severe acute malnutrition (SAM) kits** to support nutritional health programs, including support to 140 IPD-SAM Centers.
- **Trained 6021 health workers**, enhancing the capacity of the health care workforce.
- **Delivered 61 307 mental health consultations**, improving access to mental health services.
- **Ensured 12 970 safe deliveries in WHO-supported facilities**, including 7591 in PHCs and 5379 in hospitals.



WHO-supported Afghan Japan Hospital in Kabul continues to provide critical care to patients, strengthening Afghanistan's health system in 2024.
Photo credit: WHO / Zakarya Safari



WHO responding to severe floods in western and northern Afghanistan. WHO mobilized medical supplies, deployed assessment teams, and are enhancing disease surveillance to support affected communities.
Photo credit: WHO / Zakarya Safari

2025 FUNDING REQUIREMENTS

AFGHANISTAN HUMANITARIAN EMERGENCY EMERGENCY RESPONSE PILLAR		FUNDING REQUIREMENTS (US\$ '000)
Collaborative surveillance		13 263
Surveillance, case investigation and contact tracing		10 794
Diagnostics and testing		2470
Community protection		4910
Risk communication and community engagement		919
Travel, trade and points of entry		765
Infection prevention and control in communities		38
Vaccination		3188
Safe and scalable care		91 516
Infection prevention and control in health facilities		750
Case management and therapeutics		34 420
Essential health systems and services		56 347
Access to countermeasures		6803
Operational support and logistics		6220
Research, innovation and evidence		583
Emergency leadership		10 228
Leadership, coordination, PSEAH and monitoring		10 228
Grand Total		126 720