



Using quality assurance mechanisms for robust planning and implementation of sexual and reproductive health interventions in Lao PDR

Bridging the gaps in service delivery



This case study was developed by the WHO country office with support from the Country Strategy and Support (CSS) and the Prevention of Unsafe Abortion (PUA) unit at UNDP-UNFPA-UNICEF-WHO-World Bank Special Programme of Research, Development and Research Training in Human Reproduction (HRP) Department of Sexual and Reproductive Health and Research (SRH). The work was undertaken as part of a collaborative project to address unsafe abortion through a health system strengthening approach. The project ran from 2019–2023 and included ten countries; three WHO regional offices; and five WHO HQ departments working together through a technical working group coordinated by HRP.



Background

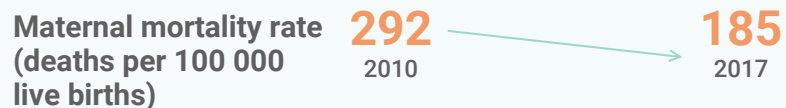
In 2021, the Lao People's Democratic Republic (Lao PDR) endorsed the National Strategy and Action Plan for Integrated Services on Reproductive, Maternal, Newborn, Adolescent and Child Health 2021–2025 to address gaps in the provision of equitable and quality services to the most vulnerable populations. The Ministry of Health also endorsed the “Agreement on the management of gestational surrogacy and induced abortion”, in which the conditions for induced abortion are described. This is expected to improve uptake and delivery of sexual and reproductive health services, including legal and safe abortion.

Lao: Facts



Percentage of young population⁴
60%

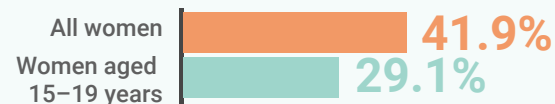
Progress⁵



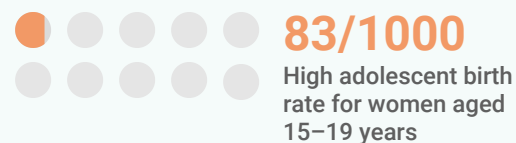
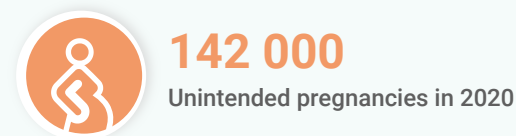
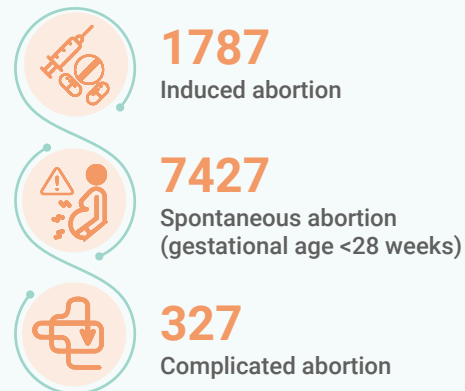
Areas of concern⁶



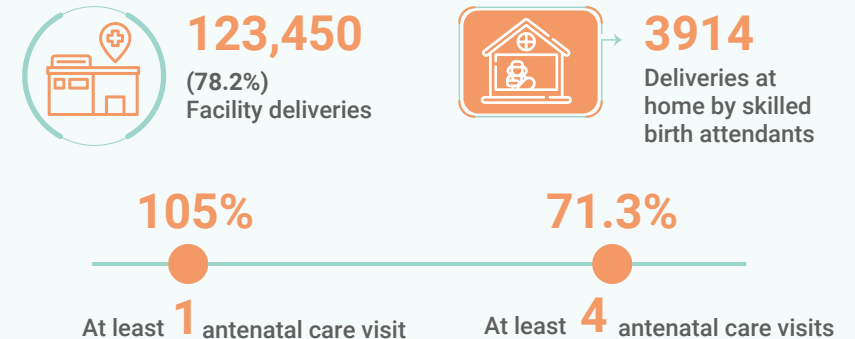
Modern contraceptive prevalence rate



Abortion⁷



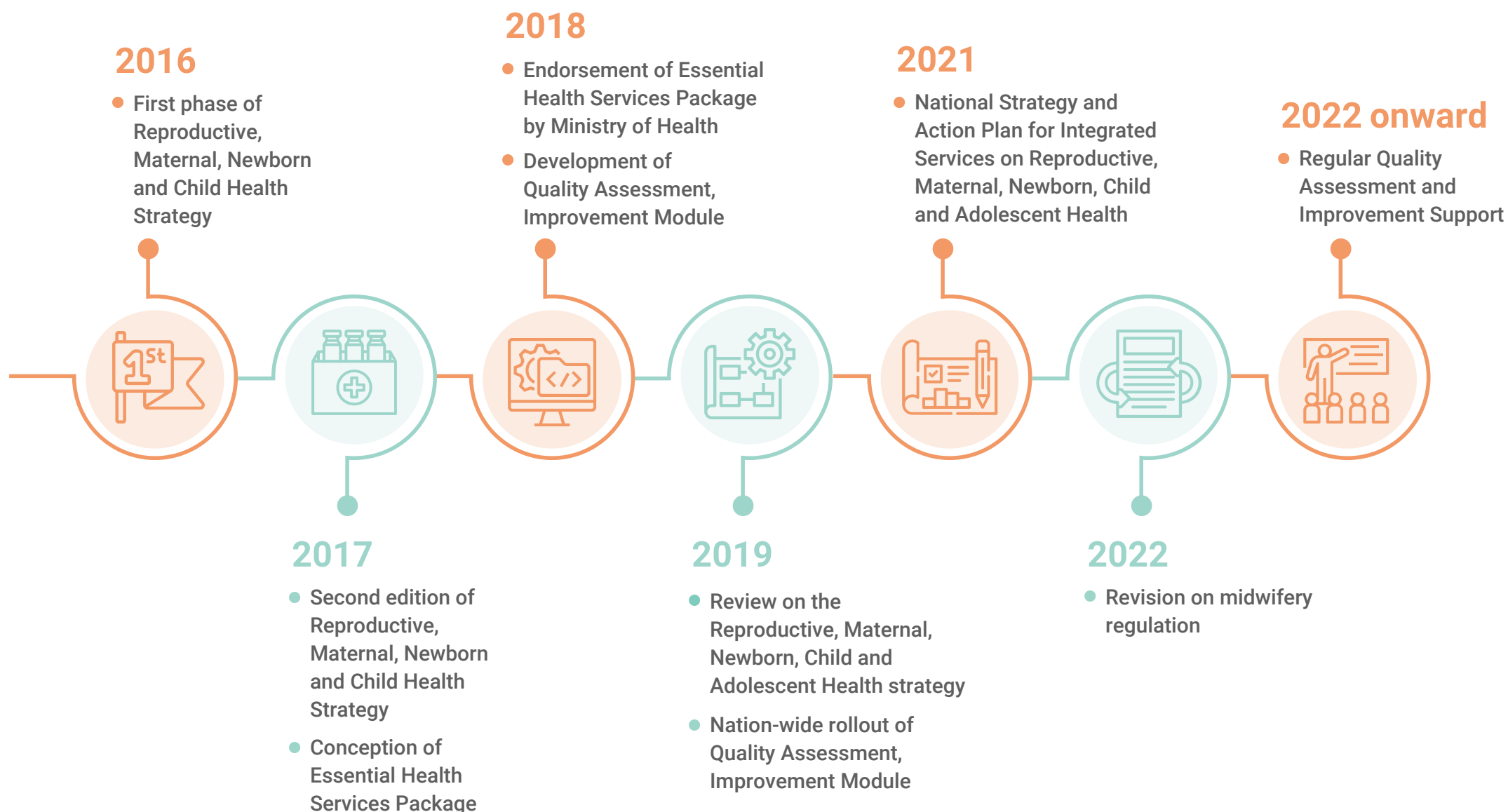
Maternal health⁸



Challenges⁹



Timeline



Note: The above list is only indicative and not reflective of a chronology.



Identification of sexual and reproductive health challenges

In 2019, a mid-term review of the Reproductive, Maternal, Newborn, Child and Adolescent Health Strategy highlighted certain structural gaps in providing equitable access and quality services to women in Lao PDR.

- 1 Lack of a comprehensive pre-service curriculum for health-care workers on SRHR services
- 2 Limited supply of essential medication and equipment for sexual and reproductive health and rights services
- 3 Restrictive regulation such as scope of midwifery practice

Quality Assessment, Improvement Module

To improve strategic planning and service delivery, five technical subcommittees were established. These Reproductive, Maternal, Newborn, Child and Adolescent Health subcommittees, supported by World Health Organization, developed a Quality Assessment and Improvement Module¹⁰ that was implemented in all provinces nation-wide in 2019.

Interventions

Essential Health Services Package

World Health Organization supported the Ministry of Health in establishing a Basic Essential Health Package, including family planning and abortion care services, as well as an essential medicines and equipment list for each level of the health system in 2018.

World Health Organization supported Ministry of Health in identifying the gaps between the midwifery workforce regulations and the Essential Health Services Package

Based on the gap analysis, Ministry of Health revised the health workforce regulations

Midwives are now legally allowed to provide modern contraceptives and medical abortion care (only for up to 12 weeks of gestational age) autonomously

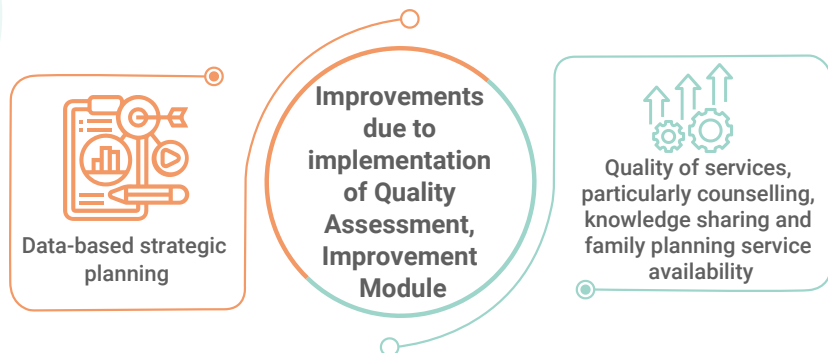
Steps that ensured high quality delivery of services defined in the Essential Health Services Package

Quality Assessment, Improvement Module adopts a facility-based assessment methodology with two components:

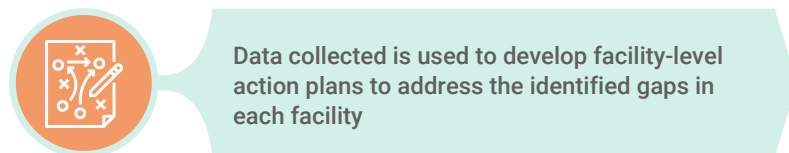
- A Clinical quality
- B Health system (including essential medicine and equipment, skilled human resource, environment and programme management)



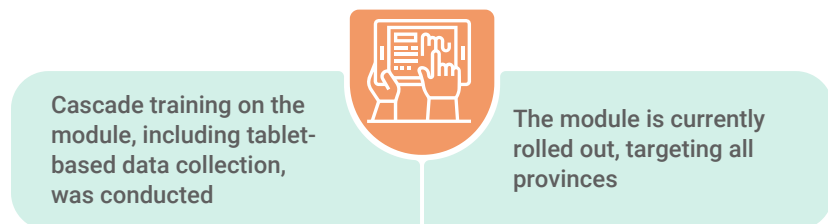
Map not to scale; only for representational purpose



In 2021, Quality Assessment, Improvement Module was adopted by the National Healthcare Quality Standard to provide a reliable assessment of the status of health facilities across the country.



In 2022, the module was reflected in the national health information system, DHIS2, and digitalized with tablets.

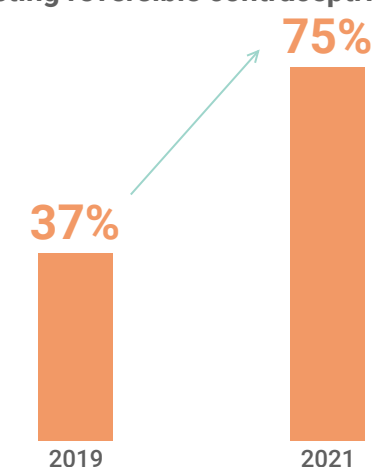


Evidence gathered via Quality Assessment, Improvement Module¹¹

Increase in annual new users of long-acting reversible contraceptives



Increase in counselling on long-acting reversible contraceptives



Availability of essential sexual and reproductive health and rights drugs in 17 facilities on the site visit day



Conclusion

By closing the gaps in delivery of Essential Health Services Package and institutionalizing a standardized module for service delivery and assessment, Lao PDR has taken significant steps to strengthen not only the sexual and reproductive health component but all pillars of the health system. Individualized assessment and action planning for the facility level backed by supportive supervision will result in use of local data for quality improvement, building of robust systems and generation of positive outcomes at the granular level.

¹ <https://data.un.org/en/iso/la.html> | ² Ibid. | ³ Ibid. | ⁴ Lao Labour Force Survey 2017, Ministry of Labour and Social Welfare |

⁵ https://cdn.who.int/media/docs/default-source/gho-documents/maternal-health-countries/maternal_health_lao_en.pdf | ⁶ FP 2020 (FP= Family planning) | <https://fp2030.org/lao-peoples-democratic-republic/> | ⁷ Lao Social Indicator Survey (LSIS) 2017 | <https://dhsprogram.com/pubs/pdf/FR356/FR356.pdf> | ⁸ DHSI2 | <https://dhis2.org/lao-supply-chain/> | ⁹ RMNCAH Strategy Mid-term Review, 2018 | ¹⁰ These are the objectives of the module- from which a graphic can be made:

1. assess current situation of service delivery, 2. supportive supervision for individual providers, 3. support health facilities to identify challenges on quality of health care and to develop an action plan, 4. collect national data for strategic planning, 5. submit score for a clinical part of the hospital accreditation. | ¹¹ DHSI2 | <https://dhis2.org/lao-supply-chain/>