

Key facts

A well-performing health workforce is **vital for providing people-centred care** that can address the challenges in the Western Pacific Region, such as noncommunicable diseases (NCDs), ageing and unreached populations.

The current health workforce is **not fully prepared to meet the expanding and changing population health needs** of the Region due to gaps between what is needed and what is available in terms of workforce numbers, geographical distribution, skill mix, productivity and safety.

Investing in the health workforce creates jobs, improves gender equity, reduces poverty, enables decent work, protects people and accelerates economic growth.

Achieving universal health coverage is impossible without **transforming the health workforce** to be people-centred, culturally sensitive, adaptive, skilled in digital health and committed to professional development.



There can be no **health system without a health workforce or human resources for health (HRH)**. A motivated and competent health workforce in the right numbers, in the right places, and with the right skill mix is central to providing people-centred, integrated care, and achieving universal health coverage and the health-related targets of the Sustainable Development Goals.

The **COVID-19 pandemic exposed the pre-existing vulnerabilities in health systems**, many of which are a result of inadequate investments in the health workforce. Despite progress made in strengthening the workforce, critical gaps remain between what is needed and what is available in terms of the number, distribution, quality and protection of health workers. Though most population health needs can be addressed in primary care settings, people often bypass these and instead seek care at hospitals, leading to overcrowding in these facilities. **Strengthening primary health care (PHC) can alleviate the workload pressure on the health workforce in hospitals** while enabling care closer to the community.

Health workforce policies must be aligned with PHC-oriented health systems to build a health workforce fit for the future. Besides funding, there is an **increased need for stewardship and improved safety and support measures** for all types of health workers. Furthermore, a renewed focus on producing and maintaining the quality of the health workforce is imperative to meet the Region's growing and changing health-care needs resulting from increasing NCDs, an ageing population and health emergencies.

Harnessing the **private sector to strengthen the health workforce** further is also crucial. Appropriate roles need to be clarified for the private sector in health systems, and stronger partnerships with the private sector are the key to attaining quality, equitable and accessible health services and a health workforce fit for the future.

WHO response

In partnership with Member States, WHO has developed a new *Regional Framework to Shape a Health Workforce for the Future of the Western Pacific*, which aims to strengthen and transform the Region's health workforce through five strategic actions:

1. **Align HRH policies with PHC-oriented health systems** to improve continuity of care and close and continuous relationships between health workers and patients, families and communities.
2. **Strengthen HRH stewardship in health systems**, including increasing funding, protecting and supporting health workers, and addressing health workforce migration.
3. **Produce and maintain quality in HRH**, including institutionalizing life-long learning and re-skilling of the health workforce based on population health needs, as well as the creation of new occupations.
4. **Steer the private sector for the public good** to recognize and clarify its roles in health systems.
5. **Manage the distribution and productivity of HRH in the public sector**, including by monitoring subnational distribution of health workers and implementing retention strategies covering education, regulation, incentives, and personal and professional support for the health workforce.

WHO works closely with Member States in the Region – in collaboration with academia and partners – to generate strong evidence to inform policy-making and to establish regional learning platforms to accelerate the exchange of information and cross-country learning on HRH. WHO is also facilitating high-level policy advocacy to sustain and scale up investments in HRH.

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