

Achieving transformative primary health care

Fact sheet: October 2024

Key facts

Primary health care (PHC) is a cornerstone of a robust health system.

By 2050, the number of people aged 60 and older in the WHO Western Pacific Region will double, creating a shift in health-care needs.

Noncommunicable diseases (NCDs) account for four of the top five causes of death in the Region. Coverage for NCD services lags behind service coverage for infectious diseases and reproductive, maternal, newborn and child health.

One in five people in the Region are spending too much on health expenses and this has been getting worse in the last 20 years.

A people-centred approach to PHC is essential to health system transformation for a better future in which people play an active role in managing their health.

A rapidly ageing population, an increasing burden of NCDs and health security risks, a worsening economic outlook and other developments in the Western Pacific Region are transforming the health needs of today and tomorrow. These changes are compounding gaps in national health systems across the Region. Many countries face health workforce shortages. Many people are pushed into poverty from excessive health-care costs. And many groups still face barriers to accessing primary health-care services due to cost, location or social and cultural factors.

Health systems must adapt how they interact with users to respond to changes in health literacy and attitudes due to, for example, more information being widely available.

Many countries struggle to adequately fund health systems due to economic challenges, including those brought about by the pandemic – forcing individuals and families to rely on out-of-pocket spending. Despite many governments' commitments to PHC, a persistent lack of funding and support has sometimes resulted in limited access and poor quality of services, especially at the primary-care level.

As emphasized by regional public health priorities, as well as strategies and frameworks on PHC and reaching the unreached, substantial underserved populations in the Region remain at higher risk of poor health. These constraints are likely to create even more unreached and underserved communities, families and individuals.

An approach that emphasizes the importance of active community engagement and effective communication to improve health outcomes is critical to effectively reach underserved and unreached populations.

WHO response

Recognizing the need to support countries in achieving transformative PHC, the WHO Regional Committee for the Western Pacific in 2022 endorsed the *Regional Framework on the Future of Primary Health Care in the Western Pacific*. The Framework highlights five strategic areas for health system transformation: models of service delivery; individual and community empowerment; workforce; financing; and enabling environments.

Since 2022, WHO has worked with Member States to create policy space for more robust political commitment and greater investment through high-level dialogue – such as the Asia-Pacific Parliamentarian Forum on Global Health – and ensured a platform to operationalize PHC reforms through the PHC Regional Framework Implementation Workshop in September 2023 and the Workshop on Models of Effective Service Delivery for Primary Health Care and Reaching the Unreached in July 2024.

With WHO support across the Region, Member States are improving strategic planning and resource allocation, transforming their national PHC system into a more resilient and sustainable health system, reforming the health system to meet changing needs, and responding to current health challenges and ensuring greater equitability. They also have developed best practices for measuring and evaluating progress towards PHC reform.

WHO partners with other stakeholders at the regional and country levels to support countries in implementing PHC reform in a way that matches their local context. WHO monitors regional progress and performance on PHC as part of universal health coverage and monitoring of progress towards the Sustainable Development Goals.

