

Pacific Heads of Health

Réunion des directeurs de la santé du Pacifique

Strengthening Primary Health Care (PHC) as a vehicle for advancing Universal Health Coverage (UHC)

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On behalf of Pacific Countries and Areas

Current situation

Context

- 'Healthy Islands' Vision (1995) supports community-based PHC toward achieving UHC
- The PICs historically provided relatively good access to PHC

Commitment

- Deterioration reported with patients bypassing PHC facilities for tertiary care
- Renewed high-level political commitment to strengthening PHC systems (2017)
- Commitments translated to national health strategic plans and other policies

Opportunity

- Policy implementation / reform process delayed due to COVID-19
- Lessons from COVID-19 on the centrality of PHC for health security create momentum for accelerating the PICTs efforts to redesign and operationalize the integrated, people-centred' PHC systems

The future we want to see

- Aspirational but realistic PHC package and delivery modalities to meet emerging needs
 - Greater attention to preventive and promotive interventions
 - Enhanced delivery of services at closer proximity to people
 - Maximum integration of services
 - Clear referral pathway with adoption of a hub and spoke model including through use of complementary digital technology
- Enhanced community engagement mechanisms and linkage between service providers and communities
- Empowered sub-national health management teams with stronger feedback loop between sub-national and national levels

Why urgent action is needed now

- The high and growing burden of NCDs suggests an inadequate focus on prevention and early detection
- The disruption caused by COVID-19 pandemic on essential health services, threatening the gains made in the past
 - Decline in routine child immunization coverage
 - Unmet need for modern contraceptives
- Increased health service delivery costs vs., health system inefficiency driven by vertical programs and resource allocation skewed toward curative care at secondary/tertiary levels
- Momentum created by the lessons from the COVID-19 pandemic on the centrality of PHC

Proposed recommendations for governments

- Update role delineation policies and essential service package, incorporating appropriate and *realistic* models that support integrated, 'people-centred' PHC
- Define the political, human resource, and economic investments needed to operationalize them
- Identify and address implementation bottlenecks
- Strengthen linkages between national and sub-national governance
- Treat PHC as an investment, not a cost

Proposed recommendations for development partners

- Continue providing support to address implementation bottlenecks for PHC strengthening in full alignment with national priorities and implementation capacity in each of the PICTs
- Prioritize the investment in integrated PHC systems, shifting away from financing for vertical programs
- Provide technical assistance to PICTs in PHC reform process, while ensuring the leadership and ownership of the PICT governments

Thank you!