WHO supports countries to develop responsive and resilient health systems that are centred on people’s needs and circumstances.
What is a health system

A health system encompasses “all organizations, people and actions whose primary intent is to promote, restore or maintain health. This includes efforts to influence determinants of health as well as more direct health-improving activities”.

To promote a common understanding of what a health system is and what constitutes health systems strengthening, WHO has defined a discrete number of interrelated “building blocks” that make up a health system, each with its priority areas and intended results:

- Service delivery
- Health workforce
- Information
- Medical products, vaccines and technologies
- Financing
- Leadership and governance
The health system building blocks

Priority areas addressed

Service delivery

Packages of essential health services; service delivery models; health infrastructure; management of health services; safety and quality of care; and demand creation for health care.

Health workforce

Ministry of health leadership for human resource for health through developing good policies and investment plans, advocacy, setting of norms and standards and intelligence. Creating, motivating and sustaining a productive workforce tackling the priority health needs.

Intended results

Ensuring delivery of effective, safe and quality personal and non-personal health interventions to those who need them, when and where needed, with minimum waste of resources.

Ensure that the health workforce works in ways that are responsive, fair and efficient to achieve the best health outcomes possible for the available resources and circumstances. Availability of health workforce in sufficient numbers, skills mix, fairly distributed; competent, responsive and productive to ensure access to care of good quality.
The health system building blocks

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Priority areas addressed</th>
<th>Intended results</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Information</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Facility and population based information and surveillance systems; research; global standards; tools; quality and completeness of data.</td>
<td>Availability of a well-functioning health information system that ensures the production, analysis, dissemination and use of reliable and timely information on health determinants, health systems performance and health status.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Medical products, vaccines and technologies</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Norms, standards, policies and regulations; reliable procurement, distribution and rational use of essential medicines and technologies; equitable access; quality.</td>
<td>Ensure equitable access by all citizens to essential medical products, vaccines and technologies of assured quality, safety, efficacy and cost-effectiveness, and their scientifically sound and cost-effective use.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
The health system building blocks

Priority areas addressed

Financing
National health financing policies; tools and data on health expenditures; costing.

Leadership and governance
Health sector policies; harmonization and alignment; oversight and regulation; coordinating prioritization of investments.

Intended results

Financing
Raise adequate funds for health in ways that ensure people can use needed services, and are protected from financial catastrophe or impoverishment associated with having to pay for services; efficient use of resources.

Leadership and governance
Ensuring strategic policy frameworks exist and are combined with effective oversight, monitoring and evaluation; Stewardship role at all levels; coalition building, the provision of appropriate regulations, incentives and accountability; Coordinating operational planning.
Strengthening the health system

Strengthening of the health system involves “improving the six health system building blocks and managing their interactions in ways that achieve more equitable and sustained improvements across health services and health outcomes”.

A functioning system

A functioning health system brings together the effects of all six building blocks to ensure availability of a trained and motivated workforce that is equitably distributed, a well maintained infrastructure, equitable access to health services, reliable supply of medicines and technologies backed by adequate funding, strong health plans which are monitored and evaluated.

Investing in the Health System

Equitable and efficient investment in the health system ensures that required health services are made available to populations as and when needed, in a manner responsive to their needs, and that they do not incur financial catastrophe in seeking care, which is the goal of universal health coverage.
Universal Health Coverage (UHC)

A country is said to have attained universal health coverage (UHC) when the whole population has access to quality health services without enduring undue financial hardship. UHC has three interrelated dimensions:

- Who is covered – Everyone who needs health services irrespective of their capacity to pay
- Which services are covered – The population should have access to population-based and personal health interventions of good quality. These must be available at the different levels of the system: community, primary, secondary, tertiary
- Financial risk protection – The cost of health services should not put people at risk of financial hardship

The goal of the Regional Office

The Regional Office assists countries with policies and technical know-how to eventually expand these three dimensions based on specific contexts. UHC is fundamentally about equity – all people get what they need and all people pay only an affordable price.
1. Comprehensive and coherent policies and strategic plans to facilitate stakeholder dialogue, prioritization and alignment

2. Evidence-based technical guidance, norms and capacity building on health system’s ‘building blocks’, including improving governance of health systems

3. Integrated essential service packages delivered at all levels, including strengthening decentralized and community levels to ensure implementation of health programmes

4. Achieving and monitoring coverage trends of the population with comprehensive, equitable, resilient, quality and efficient health services

- Priority morbidity and mortality reduction (MDGs and SDGs)
- Mitigation of health risks with poverty reduction, promoting economic gain

All countries need to ensure that health systems are resilient in order to sustain gains.
Making health systems resilient in the African Region

A resilient health system is defined as “a system that absorbs shocks and sustains gains”:

▶ It triggers health system responses to minimize the impact of crises.
▶ It protects human life and produce good health outcomes for all during a crisis and in its aftermath.
▶ It retains effective performance during and after a crisis.
▶ It has the capacity to “adapt” and ensure continued health service provision.

Resilience factors

- Improved logistics
- Information flows & triggers response
- Adequate and skilled workforce
- Health technologies and innovation
- Stable funding mechanism
- Trusted by people and communities
- Sound risk mitigation methods
- Adequate costing of health services
- Essential packages for service delivery
- Good governance and management
Six core functions of WHO

1. Providing leadership on matters critical to health and engaging in partnerships where joint action is needed

2. Shaping the research agenda and stimulating the generation, translation and dissemination of valuable knowledge

3. Setting norms and standards, and promoting and monitoring their implementation

4. Articulating ethical and evidence-based policy options

5. Providing technical support, catalyzing change and building sustainable institutional capacity

6. Monitoring the health situation and assessing health trends
To know more

- **Ouagadougou declaration on primary health care and health systems in Africa**: achieving better health for Africa in the new millennium. Brazzaville: WHO Regional Office for Africa; 2008.
- **Framework for the implementation of the Ouagadougou Declaration on Primary Health Care and Health Systems in Africa**. Brazzaville: WHO Regional Office for Africa (AFR/RC59/4); 2010
- **Algiers Declaration on Research for Health in the African Region**. Brazzaville: WHO Regional Office for Africa; 2008
- **Health system strengthening**: Improving district health service delivery and community ownership and participation (AFR/RC60/7); 2010
- **Health financing**: a strategy for the African Region; 2006
- **A Road map for scaling up the health workforce for improved health service delivery in the Region 2012-2025** (AFR/RC62/7); 2012
- **National health observatories** (AFR/RC62/13); 2012
- **Strengthening the role of hospitals in national health systems in the African Region** (AFR/RC53/R2); 2003

These and other relevant publications can be found at [www.afro.who.int/en/hss](http://www.afro.who.int/en/hss)
“Better health through resilient health systems and universal health coverage”

Health Systems and Services Cluster
WHO Regional Office for Africa
Cité du Djoué, Brazzaville
Republic of the Congo
Tel. + 47 241 39260
email afrgohssinfo@who.int
www.afro.who.int/en/hss