

PATH's experience in strengthening health systems

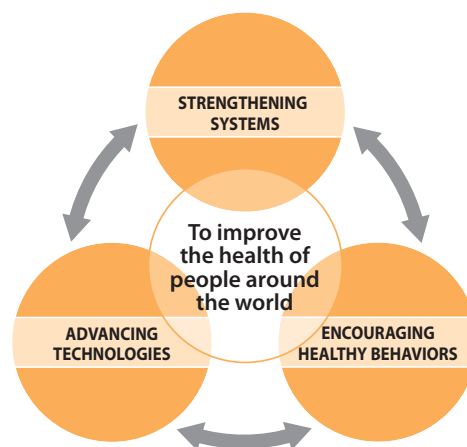
PATH strives to build a world where innovation ensures that health is within reach for everyone. We start by thinking about people. What do children, women, and men need to be healthy? Similarly, what do health workers, managers, and decision-makers need to do their jobs well? How can the information, products, or services that are needed for health best be obtained—not just for today, but for the future?



Innovators are developing new information, products, and services that hold great promise for global health. But this promise can't be realized if solutions can't be delivered. Health systems—that is, the organizations and people whose primary intent is to promote, restore, or maintain health¹—are weak in many countries and represent a challenge to achieving health equity. There is an urgent need for energy, support, and creativity to ensure that health systems can deliver effective health interventions.

This focus on systems is a core component of PATH's overall mission to improve the health of people around the world by advancing technologies, strengthening systems, and encouraging healthy behaviors. Our systems work both informs and is informed by our work with technology and behavior change.

PATH strengthens health systems to improve the health of people around the world. We pursue deliberate and measurable outcomes related to service management, policy, financing, supply systems, human resources, and information and monitoring systems. These six interrelated areas are generally accepted by the global health community as the key components of a health system.¹



Components of a health system

Service management: improving front-line health care

To deliver care and services effectively, health professionals must manage people, money, facilities, and equipment. Services must be of good quality, be offered equitably, and adhere to global standards. They also must be affordable, accessible, and acceptable so that people will use them.



PATH works extensively in service management, with an emphasis on partnering with the communities we serve. We listen to people's attitudes, ideas, and preferences through focus groups, interviews, and dialogue to gauge how our work can be most effective. To ensure that individuals make informed decisions and use the services that are available, we educate communities about their options and the quality of care they can expect. We bring people together and engage them in discussing how services are delivered, helping them effectively influence local health care services so that their needs are met. We work to extend services into the community, beyond the reach of the hospital

or clinic. For example, in Indonesia we trained traditional birth attendants—trusted community members but not formal health care workers—to identify and refer unhealthy newborns to midwives for further care. To support health workers and improve job performance, PATH helps programs offer supportive supervision. From encouraging uptake of national standards to strengthening monitoring systems, PATH helps ensure that cadres of health workers have the guidance they need to provide good care.

PATH works closely with many different stakeholders, such as government agencies and nongovernmental organizations, to coordinate services. Often we seek to expand or improve

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services by working with providers in the private sector. We also work with national health systems and coordinating organizations to design how services will be delivered. This is particularly important when promising interventions require significant changes to service approaches. The new human papillomavirus vaccine, for example, will require programs to reach adolescent girls—a population that is beyond the scope of traditional immunization programs.

PATH believes that appropriately designed technologies can help address certain gaps in service delivery. We strengthen the delivery of goods and services by introducing technologies that improve clinical services and care—for example, vaccine vial monitors, the Uniject™ prefilled injection device, and point-of-care diagnostic tools.

Policy: making good decisions about services

Sound health policies offer priorities, strategies, and protocols that are based on evidence. The overall health system must be designed equitably and sustainably. Multiple stakeholders must be coordinated. This requires effective leadership, which includes governance, strategy, planning, and transparency.



Uniject is a trademark of BD.

PATH works at all levels, from global bodies to individual facilities, to inform and support health policies. We also work at all stages of policy, from designing and developing standards to implementing job aids, training, and other tools.

A core element of our work is establishing the evidence base needed to inform policy decisions. For example, we conduct disease-burden studies, cost analyses, and demand analyses to provide decision-makers with information they need to assess health issues.

We also help inform and implement policies that support global standard-setting bodies, governments, and facilities. Our work involves aligning stakeholders, convening coalitions, and building agreement. It also involves the development of tools—such as guidelines and curricula—that move the standards from policy into practice.

Financing: essential to every health system

Financial resources are required to provide health care. These resources may be secured during the national budgeting process or through insurance schemes, innovative financing mechanisms, or donor support. Plans and budgets must be developed and managed transparently. Costs of goods and services must be determined.



PATH supports these efforts on multiple levels. Within countries, for example, we help governments develop financial strategies and structures to support specific programs, and we support governments in considering how to pay for health interventions and whether these interventions can be sustained. We are driven to find solutions to help countries maintain key health interventions, whether by securing necessary financing or structuring the commercial market to offer competitive, low prices.

PATH also conducts technology-specific analyses of financial and economic impact. We determine how much a given health intervention should cost and whether it is more cost-effective than alternatives. We analyze the overall system implications of a given intervention.

PATH's international influence enables us to advocate successfully for increased resources for global health, focusing on interventions that are cost-effective but need funding for scale-up. For

example, we have helped organize support for advance market commitments that provide vaccine developers with the incentive to identify solutions to neglected diseases.

Supply systems: a complex delivery chain

Supply systems must ensure that good-quality products are available and accessible to all people who need them, when and where people need them. Supply systems encompass the logistics of obtaining and distributing supplies, including global demand modeling, manufacture, transportation (and transportation equipment), storage and warehousing, refrigeration, and information systems to track the movement of products. The facilities and equipment needed to deliver health care services must also be maintained.



When developing and commercializing products, PATH works hard to accommodate the needs of the supply systems. We consider the entire chain of supply, from affordable manufacture to accessible distribution. Relying on our more than 30 years of experience in technology development, we strategize carefully regarding intellectual property, facilitate healthy competition to encourage lower costs, and license to both private and public partners that can make low-cost, high-quality products. We often model what the global demand is likely to be for a given product. We design products to fit within system constraints—for example, by considering packaging, stability, and storage needs. We work with coalitions at the global level to ensure products are available where they are needed.

PATH supports health care workers within the supply chain so they can better perform their jobs. We strengthen in-country procurement capacity by training staff to secure supplies—including helping programs establish product specifications to ensure quality and appropriateness. For example, PATH has developed a procurement capacity toolkit to assist staff responsible for purchasing reproductive health supplies for their country. We also procure products directly, especially where there is an urgent need.

To achieve better prices through volume discounts, PATH works with countries to negotiate prices collectively. We also help countries streamline and

manage the logistics, distribution, and upkeep of supplies and equipment.

Human resources: tapping human potential

People are the greatest resource in any health system. Health systems need enough workers with



appropriate skills to deliver goods and services. Systems must be in place for managing, supervising, and training workers. When workers are adequately compensated, engaged in meaningful work, and given opportunities for advancement, they can reach their fullest potential and provide good quality health care.

PATH empowers and supports health care staff through training and capacity-building to help workers provide good quality care. We develop curricula, organize training events, and support training through online learning and hands-on courses. Our training sessions cover public health topics such as disease surveillance and health economics; management skills, including service delivery, supply chain supervision, and budgeting/costing; and clinical skills, such as injection techniques, laboratory skills, diagnostic skills, and

PATH works with countries to manage shortages of health care workers and ensure sufficient staffing to serve local health needs.

counseling and testing for HIV. For example, in Tanzania we have trained health care workers to provide integrated HIV and tuberculosis services so that patients suffering from both diseases can more easily access the care they need.

PATH works with countries to manage shortages of health care workers and ensure sufficient staffing to serve local health needs. We support task shifting—moving tasks, where appropriate, to mid-level health workers. For example, PATH has worked to strengthen the skills of pharmacy staff, because pharmacies are often the first stop for people seeking care. We have trained staff to offer basic health counseling and refer more serious conditions to nearby health facilities.

We also help national health systems improve their capacity for managing human resources. We assist programs with developing staff checklists, adopting new protocols, strengthening supervision systems, and defining health care workers' roles.

Information and monitoring systems: knowledge is key

Countries and programs need to track many types of data—population figures, registration status, disease



burden, staffing trends, finances, and other resources—to deliver effective services. Ideally, their information systems collect this information from

multiple channels and process it in an integrated system. This information should be managed according to globally accepted methodologies and then used to support decision-making at all levels.

PATH prioritizes rigorous monitoring and evaluation. We believe good quality health programming is based on solid evidence. To build and strengthen health information systems, we develop tools and standard protocols for accurate information collection, conduct surveys, support data management, and apply this information to decision-making. Our work spans operational systems, such as management of equipment inventories and supply stocks; health information systems, including building immunization tracking systems; and disease surveillance systems, where

our research on vaccine-preventable diseases such as Japanese encephalitis has led directly to policy changes.

We also enhance the capacity of countries to collect information and, more importantly, use that information to make informed decisions about health services. We design tools and standard protocols for country use, and we supply partners with state-of-the-art technology, such as handheld computers and global positioning systems, to track data rapidly and efficiently.

Stronger systems for a healthier world

Each of these broad areas—service management, policy, financing, supply systems, human resources, and information and monitoring systems—plays a key role in improving global health. When these components are strong, health systems are strong. PATH works across the entire spectrum to help countries and people obtain the goods and services they need to be healthy.

1. World Health Organization (WHO). *Everybody's Business: Strengthening Health Systems to Improve Health Outcomes: WHO's Framework for Action*. Geneva: WHO; 2007.



1455 NW Leary Way
Seattle, WA 98107 USA
Tel: 206.285.3500
Fax: 206.285.6619

info@path.org
www.path.org