

Health policy, planning and financing

Health policy, planning and financing are closely related to one another.

Health policy

Health policy development can be considered at various levels. At the national level, national policies and legislation, together with international policies and financing agreements, govern the medium- and long-term viability of major health programmes in developing countries. At the facility level policies determine how a service should be run. The approach that Health Partners International takes is that policies should set standards that take effort to be achieved, but recognising that financial and human resource constraints may prevent the realistic achievement of 'gold standard' policy targets. Policies must also be specific and appropriate to the country in question, informed by its history and culture, socio-economic and political environment.

Health planning

Effective health planning relies on a clear understanding of health financing (see below) and an appropriate policy framework. The development of comprehensive, practical plans needs to take both supply-side and demand-side issues into account, as it has been shown that health sector reform efforts that have focused primarily on improving the supply of services have had limited impact on utilisation. Health Partners' approach to planning is therefore inclusive of those who are responsible for planning and delivery of services, and the users or beneficiaries of services.

Health financing

An understanding of health financing – what it costs to deliver services, and the mechanisms by which services are financed (whether from government resources, donor agencies or by direct payments from users) – should underpin the development of policy and the planning of service transformation. Costing studies can be used to determine the cost of individual or overall services, as well as to provide information on how these costs are paid for. They can provide information on the relative efficiency of different institutions in delivering health care. Costing studies can also be an important tool for developing the skills of planning officers as they give great insight into how a health system functions.

Examples of Health Partners' work in health policy, planning and financing

A Health Partners health economist led a costing study that was undertaken in four districts in **Tanzania**. The study, undertaken over six months, reviewed cost and activity data at three levels of health care. It estimated costs of existing health services and made projections for the future. The findings demonstrated significant variations in the unit costs for similar services between different health service providers (both between non-governmental organisation [NGO] and government providers as well as between NGOs themselves and between government providers) and variations in the efficiency of delivery of health care. The data from the study were used in an interactive model that simulated health expenditure in a district, and analysed the costs of the package of essential health services provided at district level.

In **Bangladesh** a Health Partners consultant undertook a financial review of a health card insurance scheme that funds a basic package of sexual, reproductive and general health services provided to poor people living in urban areas by the local affiliate of the British NGO Marie Stopes International. The review estimated levels of cost recovery and compared the performance of clinics in different parts of the country. Potential areas in which savings could be made in certain clinics applying efficiency measures were identified for further analysis.

In **St Lucia** Health Partners assisted the Ministry of Health in its current implementation of significant health sector reforms. The team, including an HPI consultant as external team leader and institutional development specialist, helped clarify policies and plan the reforms through the preparation of a National Strategic Health Sector Plan, which developed a number of priority health activities based on a realistic estimate of anticipated resources.

In support to the **Palestinian Authority**, Health Partners worked with a multi-donor team from the European Union, Italian Cooperation, World Bank and UK Department for International Development, to provide support, over 18 months, to the Ministry of Health in its undertaking of a strategic planning process. This process examined key choices for the future development of health services in Palestine. The team worked with Ministry of Health officials in both parts of the Occupied Palestinian Territories, undertaking studies, and facilitating discussions, of local strategic priorities. Three seminars were held, with the aim

of starting to develop a consensus on realistic policy options for the nascent state.

As part of the DFID-funded Partnerships for Transforming Health Systems programme, Health Partners provided assistance to the **Nigerian** state of Benue for the development of a medium-term strategic health plan. Taking as its starting point the various poverty reduction initiatives such as the national, state and local government economic empowerment development strategies, the plan focused on state strategies for attaining the two Millennium Development Goals of reducing maternal and child mortality and reducing the spread of HIV/AIDS. The plan includes providing a minimum service package, consisting of improved reproductive health services, promotion of child health and routine immunization and the promotion of an integrated approach to HIV/AIDS, sexually transmitted diseases and TB.

In Jigawa state, **Nigeria** Health Partners consultants undertook a study for the State Ministry of Health (SMOH) to investigate the feasibility of providing free emergency obstetric care (EOC) services on a sustainable basis. In Jigawa the cost of paying for obstetric emergencies has been found to be financially crippling for many people. As a result, even with improvements to the quality of care provided, the demand for EOC services has been unlikely to increase unless the significant financial burden were reduced. Health Partners investigated options for decreasing the high costs to patients, including the cost of providing a deferral and exemption mechanism for drugs. This information was submitted to the SMOH to be built into the planning of the State's health financing strategy.

In **Enugu** state, Nigeria Health Partners has provided health systems and social development support to the strategic planning process of health services. Our health systems consultant reviewed state health plans and policy documents, a process that revealed limited planning capacity and a lack of reliable data for informing the planning process. Our social development consultant worked with the Enugu SMOH to review the methodology used for the state health planning process, and the quality of its outputs. The review process involved wide consultation with civil society organisations. Key recommendations were that the SMOH should strive to move to a more inclusive and participatory planning process involving wide consultation with stakeholders outside the ministry, and to equip managers with the skills to analyse problems within the health sector and to develop appropriate strategies and interventions to deal with the underlying causes of those problems.

In **Namibia** Health Partners provided support to the Ministry of Health and Social Services to design a complex, six-component, four-year programme to improve the efficiency of core health and social welfare programmes in seven regions. The programme aimed to improve health and social services management at regional and district levels; provide training networks with improved management systems to support pre- and in-service training; improve management and delivery of priority social welfare services; improve policy, planning and management capacity at national level facilitated by a functional Management Information System; sustain use of healthcare technology and physical facilities; and improve systems of mental health programme management and case management of mental health at all levels. Our consultants provided specialised technical assistance in regional and district management; public health services; human resources management and capacity building; social welfare assessment and planning; health facilities assessment and planning; and equipment management.