

## Public–private partnerships in health

In the context of health, a wide variety of initiatives can take on the form of ‘public–private partnerships’ (PPPs). These might include private sector involvement in product development or distribution programmes within public health systems, joint initiatives by a government and the private sector to strengthen specific health programmes, or contracting by the public sector of private sector service delivery organisations. In many low-income countries, faith-based organisations have historically been contracted by the public sector to deliver essential public health services and in so doing play a vital role.

Until recently, foreign support for these organisations had diminished dramatically as policy interest shifted to supporting public sector reform efforts. However, many governments, such as those of Kenya and Uganda, are now recognising the role of these organisations in their new health sector strategies.

Some of the major opportunities and challenges currently facing faith-based health services include how to:

- attract and retain skilled health workers
- work effectively with government and to link with public health services
- maintain access for the poor where external support is diminishing
- approach the issue of faith in the provision of services
- develop effective umbrella organisations in order to strengthen the profile and negotiating power of the sector
- strengthen organisation and management systems
- contribute to governments’ efforts to achieve equity goals.

### **Health Partners International’s work in public–private partnerships**

Health Partners International has considerable experience, spanning 25 years, of working with and supporting the contribution of faith-based health services in public–private partnerships, in countries such as Nigeria and Ghana. Members of our team have worked as health professionals, managers and administrators of faith-based hospitals and primary health care services, and as short-term technical advisers.

Health Partners International recognises that if faith-based health services are to play a key role in supporting the achievement of the health-related Millennium Development Goals, it is essential that they can improve their strategic and operational planning capacity, that key sub-systems

such as drugs and procurement, financial management, general and human resource management are robust, and that the sector can more effectively manage its relationships with government and funders. The faith-based sector’s potential for delivering basic health services to communities that are geographically remote or otherwise under-served by the public sector is as yet untapped, but holds much promise for helping governments operationalise their policy commitments to health equity.

Some examples of our work in this area include:

- Providing health management expertise to support the re-opening of faith-based hospitals in Zimbabwe after the struggle for independence.
- Leading a three-year programme of support to the Christian Health Association of Nigeria (CHAN) to strengthen its medical supply services, its internal management and the support it provides to health facilities across the country
- Facilitating the first five-year strategic plan of the Christian Health Association of Ghana (CHAG), introducing an annual process of comprehensive peer appraisal and planning for all 60 CHAG hospitals, and carrying out an independent review of CHAG’s performance
- Planning the upgrading, rehabilitation and new development of faith-based primary health care facilities and hospitals and their medical equipment in a number of countries
- Assisting faith-based health services in Kenya to plan HIV/AIDS services
- Organising a comprehensive peer assessment of Tanzania’s two largest mission hospitals (KCMC and Bugando) and helping to plan a hospital reform initiative for these and other tertiary facilities
- Assisting faith-based health services in a number of countries in their negotiations and relations with government.