

Building Stronger Health Systems in the African Region



Message from the Director

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Our work is anchored in the Primary Health Care (PHC) approach and guided by the shared ambition of achieving Universal Health Coverage (UHC). Together with governments, regional institutions and partners, we are working to ensure that health systems across the African Region are stronger, more resilient and better equipped to improve the health and well-being of all people.



Across the African Region, countries have made important progress in improving the health and well-being of their populations. Life expectancy has increased, child survival has improved significantly, and new opportunities are emerging through innovation, digital technologies and stronger regional collaboration. These achievements demonstrate what is possible when countries invest in health.

Yet many people across the Region still face barriers in accessing the care they need. Shortages of health workers, gaps in financing, limited access to medicines and diagnostics, and weaknesses in health information systems continue to limit the ability of health systems to deliver equitable, high-quality services.

The Health Systems and Services Cluster at the WHO Regional Office for Africa works with Member States and partners to address these challenges by strengthening the foundations of health systems. By bringing together expertise across health financing, governance, service delivery, workforce development, medicines and technologies, data systems, research and innovation, the Cluster supports countries to build resilient, people-centred health systems capable of delivering quality services for all.

Dr Adelheid Werimo Onyango,

Director of Health Systems and Services Cluster



Why Health Systems Matter?

Strong health systems are the foundation of healthy societies. They ensure that people can access the services they need, when and where they need them, without financial hardship.


Across the African Region, health outcomes have improved over the past decades, yet many countries continue to face significant challenges. Persistent gaps in health financing, shortages of health workers, limited access to medicines and diagnostics, fragmented service delivery systems and weaknesses in health information systems continue to limit equitable access to care.

Strengthening health systems is therefore essential to accelerate progress toward Universal Health Coverage, improve resilience to health emergencies and ensure that essential services reach all populations.


To support Member States in addressing these challenges, the WHO Regional Office for Africa established the Health Systems and Services (HSS) Cluster, bringing together complementary technical expertise to advance health systems strengthening across the Region.

The work of the Cluster is anchored in the Primary Health Care approach, which provides the foundation for equitable, accessible and people-centred health systems capable of delivering services across the life course.


Health Systems Challenges in the African Region



152 million people are pushed into poverty each year due to health spending



The Region faces a projected shortage of **6.1 million health workers** by 2030



The African Region accounts for **nearly 69%** of global maternal deaths

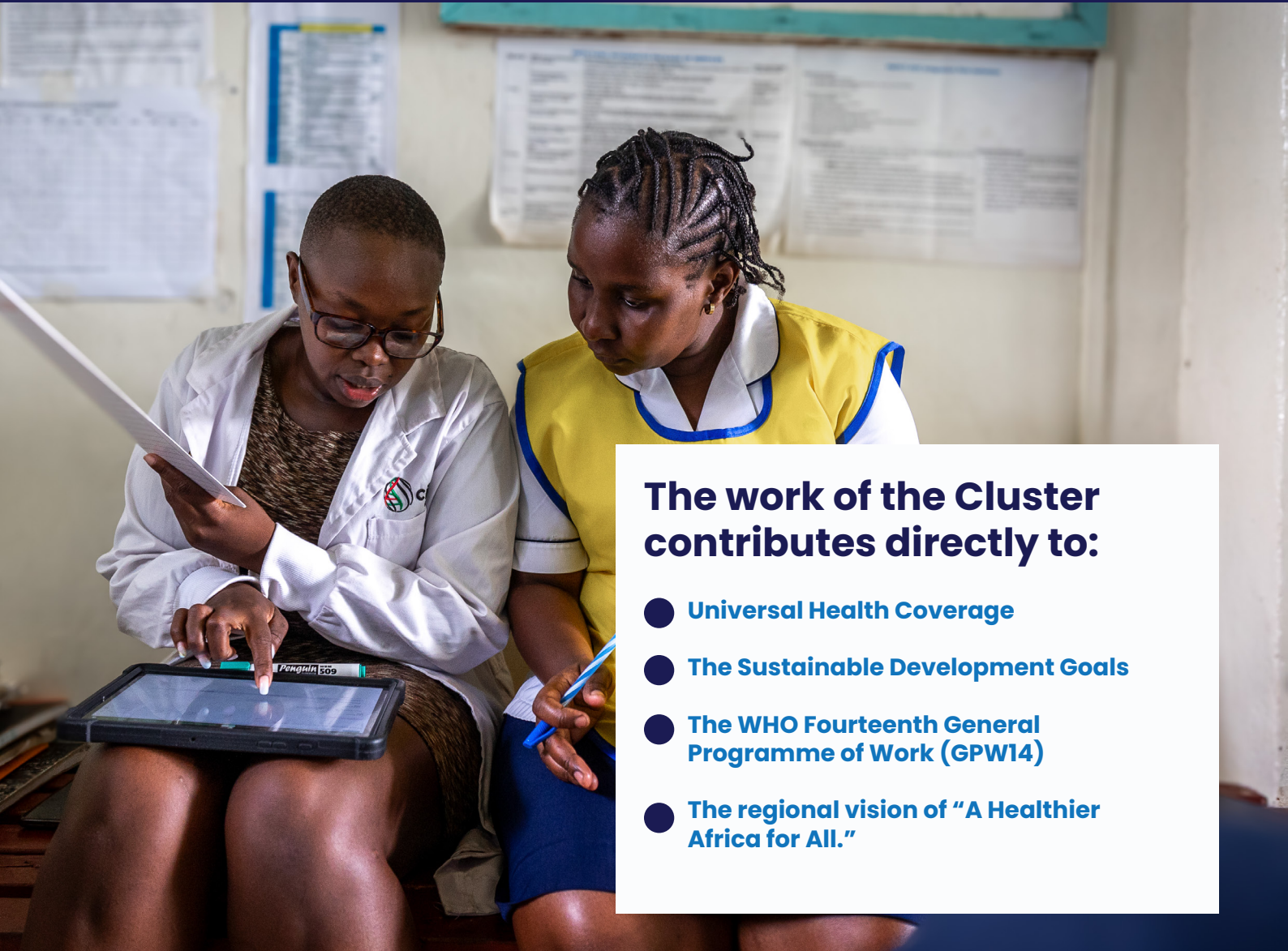
Strengthening health systems is therefore essential to improving health outcomes and ensuring equitable access to care across the Region.



A Platform for Health Systems Transformation

The Health Systems and Services Cluster serves as WHO's platform for strengthening health systems across the African Region. The Cluster brings together eight technical teams whose work collectively addresses the core components of health systems strengthening.

Through technical guidance, policy dialogue, partnerships and regional initiatives, the Cluster supports Member States in building resilient health systems capable of delivering quality services and improving health outcomes.



The work of the Cluster contributes directly to:

- Universal Health Coverage
- The Sustainable Development Goals
- The WHO Fourteenth General Programme of Work (GPW14)
- The regional vision of "A Healthier Africa for All."



Strategic Pathways for Strengthening Health Systems

To support Member States in strengthening health systems across the African Region, the HSS Cluster focuses on four complementary strategic pathways.

CAPACITATE

Strengthening the core capacities of health systems, including workforce development, governance, service delivery platforms, health information systems and access to essential medicines and technologies.

INVEST

Mobilizing sustainable financing and strengthening health financing systems to expand financial protection, improve efficiency and ensure adequate investment in health systems.

DELIVER

Supporting Member States in strengthening service delivery platforms so that populations can access integrated, high-quality health services across the life course.

SAFEGUARD

Providing tailored support to fragile, vulnerable and conflict-affected settings, including Small Island Developing States, to protect essential health services and strengthen health system resilience.



Areas of Work

The Health Systems and Services Cluster brings together eight technical teams whose work collectively strengthens the foundations of health systems across the African Region. Through policy guidance, technical assistance and regional initiatives, these teams support countries in building resilient, equitable and people-centred health systems capable of delivering quality services across the life course.



Health Financing and Governance

Sustainable financing and strong governance are essential for resilient health systems and for ensuring that people can access care without financial hardship. The Health Financing and Governance team supports countries in designing and implementing policies that strengthen health financing systems, improve efficiency in resource allocation and expand financial protection.

The team works with governments and partners to promote strategic purchasing, strengthen governance and accountability mechanisms, and support countries in mobilizing domestic and external resources for health. This work helps countries move toward Universal Health Coverage while ensuring that health systems are sustainably financed and effectively governed.



Health Workforce

Health workers are the backbone of every health system. The Health Workforce team supports countries in strengthening workforce planning, education, deployment and retention to ensure that health systems have the skilled professionals needed to deliver quality services.

WHO works with Member States to strengthen health professions education, improve workforce distribution, and support investments in health employment. A key regional initiative is the Africa Health Workforce Investment Charter, which mobilizes governments, partners and institutions to strengthen health workforce capacity and accelerate progress toward Universal Health Coverage across the Region.



Integrated Service Delivery and Primary Health Care

Integrated, people-centred health services are essential to achieving Universal Health Coverage. The Integrated Service Delivery and Primary Health Care team supports countries in strengthening service delivery platforms and revitalizing the Primary Health Care approach.

The team works with Member States to develop essential health service packages, strengthen district health systems, improve quality of care and promote integrated service delivery across the life course. By reinforcing primary health care systems, WHO helps ensure that essential services reach communities and contribute to stronger, more resilient health systems.



Medicines, Diagnostics and Health Technologies

Access to safe, effective and affordable medicines, diagnostics and health technologies is critical for effective health service delivery. The Medicines, Diagnostics and Health Technologies team supports countries in strengthening regulatory systems, improving supply chains and expanding access to essential health products.

WHO also works with countries and partners to promote local production of medical products, strengthen procurement mechanisms and improve forecasting and supply management systems to ensure reliable access to quality health technologies.



Health Information and Knowledge Management

Reliable data is essential for effective health planning and decision-making. The Health Information and Knowledge Management team supports countries in strengthening health information systems and promoting the use of data to guide health policies and investments.

A key regional initiative is the WHO AFRO Regional Data Hub, which supports countries in improving health data availability, strengthening analytics and enhancing the use of evidence for decision-making across the Region.



Research, Digital Health and Innovation

Research, digital technologies and innovation are transforming health systems and creating new opportunities to improve service delivery. The Research, Digital Health and Innovation team supports countries in strengthening research governance, expanding digital health capabilities and promoting evidence-informed policymaking.

WHO also supports Member States in developing digital health strategies, strengthening clinical research capacity and scaling innovative health solutions that improve efficiency, accessibility and quality of care.



Antimicrobial Resistance

Antimicrobial resistance (AMR) is a growing global health threat that undermines the effectiveness of life-saving medicines and weakens health systems. The AMR team supports countries in implementing coordinated national responses to antimicrobial resistance.

This work includes strengthening surveillance systems, promoting responsible use of antimicrobials, supporting national action plans and advancing multisectoral collaboration through the One Health approach.



Family and Reproductive Health

The Family and Reproductive Health team supports countries in strengthening health systems to deliver integrated sexual, reproductive, maternal, newborn, child, adolescent and older persons' health services.

Through policy support, normative guidance and partnerships, WHO works with Member States to improve access to quality services across the life course and accelerate progress toward reducing preventable maternal, newborn and child deaths.





Supporting Member States Across the African Region

The Health Systems and Services Cluster supports Member States across the WHO African Region through technical guidance, policy dialogue and capacity-building initiatives that strengthen national health systems.

Working closely with WHO country offices, the Cluster provides expertise to support health sector reforms, strengthen workforce capacity, improve health financing systems, expand access to medicines and technologies and strengthen data systems for better decision-making.



Working with Partners

Strengthening health systems requires collaboration across governments, institutions and partners. The HSS Cluster works with regional institutions, development partners, academic institutions and civil society organizations to advance sustainable health systems reforms across the African Region.

Through partnerships, WHO supports coordinated action to strengthen health systems, expand access to essential services and improve health outcomes for populations across the Region.



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