

Transforming Health Systems Initiative

Strategy Overview

While health spending has increased dramatically around the world, access to affordable, quality services has not, particularly in developing countries. Achieving good and equitable health outcomes for poor people around the world depends, in part, on the performance of health systems—networks of organizations, people, and government entities with the primary intent of promoting, maintaining, or restoring health.

In recent years, global health has focused on disease and population-specific programs, while health systems have been neglected. This has resulted in weakened stewardship of health systems, dysfunctional service delivery, and inequitable financing, especially for poor people. Many in under-resourced areas have no access to health services, millions are impoverished by catastrophic personal health expenditures every year, and quality care is considered a luxury. While the challenge of creating high-performing health systems is universal, the problems are especially acute in developing countries, where nearly 10 million children and over 500,000 women die every year from addressable causes.

Yet as globalization advances, new technologies and demographic, epidemiologic, and economic shifts are transforming health systems in countries around the world. There is a window of opportunity to promote strategies that steer this transformation toward better health outcomes and financial protection through improved health systems performance and the expansion of universal health coverage in low- and middle-income countries.

The Rockefeller Foundation's Transforming Health Systems (THS) initiative aims to catalyze system-strengthening activities that create broader access to affordable health services in developing countries. The initiative includes both global and country-specific work. At the global level, the initiative focuses on research and agenda setting to generate the evidence needed to elevate the profile of health systems on the global agenda and promote concerted action by the international community. At the national level, Rockefeller supports cross-cutting and synergistic activities in selected sub-Saharan African and Southeast Asian countries that can serve as demonstration projects for replication and expansion.

Like all systems, health systems are complex and holistic—not just the sum of its parts; and the parts are also similar to other organizational systems which include governance, human resources, financing, technology, etc. THS does not take on every component of health systems; while important, THS will not build hospitals, develop millions of clinical cadres, or provide drugs and vaccines for particular diseases. Instead, THS will focus on strategic levers selected because of their neglect by the international and donor community and their potential for catalytic transformation and impact.

CHANGE LEVERS

- **Fostering health systems research and agenda setting.** There has been a lack of attention and funding for health systems among key donors and technical agencies, and universal coverage is considered unaffordable even in the United States. Evidence is needed both for advocacy and to enhance health systems performance. The Foundation is promoting increased attention and funding of health systems among key donors and technical agencies to focus on more research, better policies, and larger funding flows to support integrated health systems work and the costs of transitioning to universal health coverage in low- and middle-income countries.
- **Enhancing professional capacity for health systems stewardship.** Developing countries have weak capacity to collect, analyze, and use health systems data to plan and manage high-performing comprehensive HS. The Foundation supports training activities that build capabilities at the ministerial, academic, and professional levels in targeted countries to promote stewardship of health systems and to improve those nations' capacity to collect, analyze, and use data to plan and manage high-performing health systems.
- **Harnessing the private sector as an important component of health systems.** In the developing world, 75% of health spending takes place in the private sector, which is a potential hub of innovation but which is largely neglected by ministries of health and donors. The Rockefeller Foundation supports the development of models that harness the private health sector in the financing and provision of health services for poor people, directly or by enabling more technical assistance and funding flows to these models, as well as by fostering better public stewardship of mixed health systems.
- **Leveraging interoperable eHealth systems in the Global South.** As connectivity is leapfrogged in Africa through wireless and fiber-optic networks, and before we see the emergence of a jungle of incompatible eHealth applications, there is a window of opportunity to create interoperable eHealth systems (not silos). The initiative promotes the design and implementation of interoperable eHealth systems by supporting national planning and policies, developing common models that can be shared among countries, strengthening capacity in the Global South for eHealth, and supporting new and existing networks working in this space.

KEY OUTCOMES

Outcome Area 1 – Leadership and Policy influence

Universal Health Coverage is accepted as a feasible and desirable goal and policy framework by key global forums and adopted by a growing number of country governments.

Outcome Area 2 – Capacity Building

Capacity is built in selected THS countries for the development and robust stewardship of health systems, including public and private components.

Outcome Area 3 – Innovation and tools, and Partnerships

Interoperable eHealth systems, supported by new global public-private partnerships and networks, are developed, deployed, and used in selected THS countries to improve quality, access, and affordability of health services.

IMPACT

The desired impact of the THS Initiative is that the health status and financial resilience of poor and vulnerable populations are measurably improved as a result of better health systems performance and the expansion of universal health coverage, defined as access to appropriate health services for all at an affordable cost.

Our Vision of Success

The lives of people will improve, particularly the poor and vulnerable, by enabling all to have access to timely and appropriate health services at an affordable cost. People will be more secure knowing that both financial protection and health services are available to them at a cost they can afford. In addition, people at various levels of the health system will have accurate information about health choices and will make more informed decisions.

The global health agenda will embrace the strengthening of health systems in a movement toward systems supporting universal health coverage. This shift will accompany a deeper understanding of health systems and the systematic changes that are needed within the global health architecture. Institutions and financing agencies (ministries of health, donors, NGO's and the private sector) will increase their support for country health systems to improve performance and foster universal coverage, including such levers as stewardship capacity and eHealth. Internal incentives will be available to strengthen learning between policy and practice, resulting in improved policy development and greater alignment of finance to improve health outcomes.

Ministries of Health at country level will be better able to allocate their resources more efficiently as a result of a transformation of domestic financing. There will be more communication and dialogue between governments and the private sector and therefore more capacity and incentives to collaborate with each other. In addition, governments would have the capacity and incentives to use data coming from the health system to make decisions about health resources at the central and district levels. Country health information systems will be interoperable and using open standards. Finally, international institutions/NGOs will service the local country health system and will empower national governments to take a leadership role.