

Engaging the private health service delivery sector through governance in mixed health systems:

strategy report of the WHO Advisory Group on the Governance of the Private Sector for Universal Health Coverage





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Contents

Foreword	iv
Acknowledgements	vii
Acronyms	vii
Executive summary	viii
Introduction.....	1
Critical definition	3
Methodology	4
Context and rationale	6
Strategic framework.....	14
Theory of change.....	16
Goals.....	18
Priorities for action.....	30
Timeline for action and metrics of success	32
Conclusion.....	34
References.....	36

Foreword

The finalization of this strategy comes at a difficult time for WHO and the world, having to address COVID-19 in the context of an ever-evolving understanding of the science, systems and political resolve needed for its containment. Some Member States have questioned the WHO's response, authority and even its neutrality. For Member States, public health responses have been a negotiated and sometimes contested arena as governments grapple with the economic fallout of the pandemic alongside its human toll. The WHO's ability to work transnationally and inter-sectorally has been called into question as governments look inwards and assemble response strategies.

While the context is not optimal for releasing a new WHO strategy, many of the fundamental issues that Member States are grappling with are due to the lack of strategy for private sector engagement within mixed health systems. Many lower- and middle-income countries (LMICs) have a large and growing contingent of private sector health service delivery actors that have historically been weakly governed and poorly coordinated. Now more than ever, LMICs need a whole-of-government and whole-of-society approach as they immerse in the battle against COVID-19. The private sector can and should be engaged in this battle.

This strategy seeks to redress a critical health system governance gap for the effective engagement of the private health service delivery sector in the context of Universal Health Coverage. Current events have further served to reinforce the need for private sector engagement as part of global, regional, and national health security and have exposed the limitations of not having a strategy or the corresponding resources necessary for effectively engaging with the private sector. Previous private sector engagement has largely been vertically driven, often focused on specific diseases or conditions. In contrast, this strategy mounts a health systems response to private sector engagement. While there is a tendency to focus on the poorly behaved within the private sector in the time of COVID-19 – the refusal to treat patients or price gouging have been documented in some contexts – similar poor behaviors have also been documented within the public sector, e.g. withholding of personal protective equipment (PPE) or diversion of resources. In times of crisis, real solutions do no benefit from divisive tactics, but arise through a collective response, one that places the “public” at the center of the public health response.

Robust governance of the health system – the whole health service delivery system – is good for both the private sector and the public sector, but most importantly, it is good for the health outcomes of the population. It is improvement of health outcomes under universal health coverage that drives us to take this bold step to release this strategy not despite the current context, but because of it.

Respectfully submitted,
David Clarke, Health Systems Governance and Financing, WHO
July 2020



WHAT?

A well-governed health system in which public and private actors collectively deliver on the realization of UHC.

HOW?

Building consensus around the means and strategies of engaging the private sector in health care service delivery.

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