



Overview of Lao Health System Development 2009–2017





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CONTENTS

Abbreviations	iv
Foreword	v
Executive Summary	vi
1. Introduction	1
Overview of progress in health system development in the Lao People's Democratic Republic, 2009-2017	4
2. Overall Progress	7
2.1. Quality	7
2.2. Efficiency	8
2.3. Equity	8
2.4. Accountability	9
2.5. Sustainability and Resilience	10
3. Health System Overview	11
3.1. Governance	11
3.2. Human Resources for Health	15
3.3. Health Care Financing	23
3.4. Service Delivery	28
3.5. Health Information System	36
4. Priority Programmes	41
4.1. Reproductive, Maternal, Newborn and Child Health	41
4.2. Extended Programme on Immunization	52
4.3. Communicable Diseases and Health Emergencies	57
4.4. Noncommunicable Diseases	73
4.5. Environmental Health	75
5. The Way Forward	79
5.1. Health in Transition	79
5.2. Challenges	80
5.3. Next Steps	82
Bibliography	87

ABBREVIATIONS

ADB	Asian Development Bank
APSED III	Asia Pacific Strategy for Emerging Diseases and Public Health Emergencies
ASEAN	Association of Southeast Asian Nations
AMR	antimicrobial resistance
BEmOC	basic emergency obstetric care
DHIS2	District Health Information Software 2
EDC	Educational Development Centre
EPI	Expanded Programme on Immunization
ESP	essential service package
FDD	Food and Drug Department
Gavi	Gavi, the Vaccine Alliance
GDP	gross domestic product
Global Fund	Global Fund to Fight AIDS, Tuberculosis and Malaria
GNI	gross national income
HIS	health information system
HMIS	health management information system
HRH	human resources for health
HRH-TWG	Human Resources for Health Technical Working Group
HSDP	Health Sector Development Plan
HSR	health sector reform
HSRF	Health Sector Reform Strategy and Framework till 2025
IHR (2005)	International Health Regulations
IPC	infection prevention and control
LDC	least developed country
LECS	Lao Expenditure and Consumption Survey
M&E	monitoring and evaluation
MCH	maternal and child health
MDG	Millennium Development Goal
MMR	maternal mortality ratio
MPI	Ministry of Planning and Investment
NCD	noncommunicable disease
NHI	National Health Insurance
NIP	National Immunization Programme
OOP	out of pocket
RMNCH	reproductive, maternal, newborn and child health
SARA	Service Availability and Readiness Assessment
SBA	skilled birth attendant
SDG	Sustainable Development Goal
TB	tuberculosis
UHC	universal health coverage
UHS	University of Health Sciences
UN	United Nations
WASH	water, sanitation and hygiene
WHO	World Health Organization

FOREWORD

The Ministry of Health of the Lao People's Democratic Republic and the World Health Organization (WHO) are pleased to present the *Overview of Lao Health System Development 2009–2017*. This document presents a snapshot of the existing health system in the Lao People's Democratic Republic, highlighting the very significant progress made over the past decade. The report identifies key achievements and challenges, as well as opportunities for future development. We hope this report will serve as a foundation for WHO and other development partners in assisting the Lao People's Democratic Republic to achieve universal health coverage, and ultimately the Sustainable Development Goals.

Findings from the report indicate the need to focus more efforts on the implementation of priority health programmes, in particular by providing improved access and financial protection for hard-to-reach populations. We must also continue to focus on strengthening the health system, especially its resilience to external shocks. Enhancing vigilance in monitoring and addressing emerging infectious diseases are also an important priority.

On behalf of the Ministry of Health and WHO, we express our gratitude to the many WHO country office staff who contributed to the content of this document. In a spirit of continued partnership and solidarity, we look forward to working together to further strengthen the health system of the Lao People's Democratic Republic over the next five years, to improve the health of the 6.5 million people of this great country.



Associate Professor Dr Bounkong Syhavong
Minister of Health
Lao People's Democratic Republic

A handwritten signature in black ink, reading "Dr. Shin Young-soo".

Dr Shin Young-soo
Regional Director for the Western Pacific
World Health Organization

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This document aims to provide an overall picture of the status of health sector developments in the Lao People's Democratic Republic over the past decade, acknowledging the significant shifts in policy scenarios, leadership and governance structures during this period. This has resulted in impressive progress in some areas of health service provision; however, other areas require further efforts and investment to catch up. The document is intended to provide a baseline to guide further developments across the health sector to fulfil the development goals of the Government of the Lao People's Democratic Republic.

Over the past 10 years, the health of the Lao population improved significantly, with life expectancy at birth rising steadily to reach 66 years in 2015¹. The Lao People's Democratic Republic achieved the Millennium Development Goal (MDG) target of reducing its maternal mortality ratio (MMR) by more than 75% and the national Government target on reducing child mortality. Reported vaccination coverage has continued to improve, and a wide range of vaccines are available through Government and donor support. The Lao People's Democratic Republic managed to achieve the MDG target related to malaria deaths before 2015. The prevalence of all forms of tuberculosis (TB) has been halved from 1990 levels. The MDG target on access to improved sanitation and drinking water has been achieved as well.

Since 2009, the Lao health sector has witnessed significant change and achievements in the outcomes of health services for its population. As the country moves towards graduation from least developed country (LDC) status in 2020, universal health coverage (UHC) and its five attributes (quality; efficiency; equity; accountability and good governance; and sustainability and resilience) are the central vessels for guiding the country as it strives to achieve the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) by 2030.

Policy and leadership changes, especially since health sector reform (HSR), have initiated a series of key shifts across the health system, including: changes to donor coordination, the introduction of National Health Insurance, the reform of the health information system and the introduction of an essential service package.

Considerable progress in provision of the priority public health programmes is evident. Under HSR, reproductive, maternal, newborn and child health (RMNCH) has been identified as a spearhead programme through which innovative implementation approaches can be tested and demonstrated for other programmes to scale up. Of the 10 indicators identified by the National Assembly to track health sector progress towards UHC/SDGs achievements, seven are RMNCH-focused indicators. This in itself highlights the importance that RMNCH holds within the health sector in terms of contributing to progress in reaching the 2020 and 2030 targets. Similarly, the Lao People's Democratic Republic has made considerable progress in the area of immunization. In addition to steadily increasing immunization coverage rates, the National Immunization Programme has taken steps to address inequities by focusing on hard-to-reach populations.

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