

HANDBOOK FOR NATIONAL QUALITY POLICY AND STRATEGY

**A practical approach for developing policy
and strategy to improve quality of care**



**World Health
Organization**

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**A practical approach for developing policy and strategy
to improve quality of care**

Co-developed by the World Health Organization and countries
pursuing national quality initiatives



Handbook for national quality policy and strategy: a practical approach for developing policy and strategy to improve quality of care
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FOREWORD

The Sustainable Development Goals place a clear emphasis on achieving universal health coverage, which means “ensuring that all people and communities can use the promotive, preventive, curative, rehabilitative and palliative health services they need, *of sufficient quality to be effective*, while also ensuring that the use of these services does not expose the user to financial hardship”.

The WHO Framework on Integrated People-centred Health Services presents a vision for the future in which “all people have access to health services that are provided in a way that responds to their preferences, are coordinated around their needs and are safe, effective, timely, efficient and of an acceptable quality”. The proposed action within the WHO Framework places *a clear emphasis on policy levers to enhance quality*.

The development, refinement and execution of a national quality policy and strategy is a priority for countries as they strive to improve the performance of their health care systems. With the growing momentum towards universal health coverage, there is a corresponding awareness that improved access must be accompanied by focused efforts to improve the quality of health services to achieve the desired improvements in health outcomes.

Countries are seeking advice to inform their efforts on national quality policy and strategy. They are taking diverse approaches with multiple entry points for improving quality, and many are also looking to the subnational level as a focus for action. However, the objective remains the same: improvement in quality of health care as a pivotal entry point for health systems strengthening, and ultimately achieving enhanced population health.

In recognition of this critical need, the WHO initiative on national quality policy and strategy has four objectives: (a) to raise awareness, knowledge and skills concerning national quality policy and strategy in low- and middle-income countries; (b) to outline key processes for the planning, development and implementation of national quality policy and strategy; (c) to provide support to countries in this arena; and (d) to continue co-development and documentation of processes related to the development and implementation of national quality policies and strategies within a learning laboratory arrangement.

This document provides a foundation for this initiative, building on an existing body of work from WHO and others. It provides structure around the subject area, outlines some of the key issues for consideration and presents a starting point for the action that needs to follow. It will continue to be refined through a co-development process involving countries and technical partners, which will also yield a number of complementary resources. This handbook is one output of a larger initiative that seeks to respond to the needs of countries for strategic and practical counsel around national quality policies and strategies. The linkages with wider health policy and planning are central to this approach.

The audience for this foundation document is diverse. The primary audience is those responsible for leading the development and implementation of national quality policies and strategies. A much wider set of stakeholders who actively participate in the national process will benefit. Partners at the national, regional and global level that are involved in providing support in quality improvement efforts will also stand to benefit from the content provided.

Each country must pursue its own pathway to universal health coverage guided by multiple and complex considerations. A carefully designed national approach to quality can be a pivotal entry point for countries as they work to achieve better health outcomes.

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ABBREVIATIONS

GLL	Global Learning Laboratory for Quality Universal Health Coverage
HMIS	health management information system
MDG	Millennium Development Goal
NQPS	national quality policy and strategy
OECD	Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development
SDG	Sustainable Development Goal
WASH	water, sanitation and hygiene
WHO	World Health Organization

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