

WHO

Country Cooperation Strategy

Bhutan 2014–2018



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Message from His Excellency the Minister of Health



The World Health Organization (WHO) is a key partner of the health sector of our nation. I am therefore very pleased to convey my message of appreciation of the work of WHO in Bhutan at the commencement of the fourth Country Cooperation Strategy.

This document reflects the evolving nature of the collaboration between WHO and the Royal Government of Bhutan. This *WHO Country Cooperation Strategy Bhutan 2014–2018*, while building on the achievements of the past, places emphasis on emerging challenges that the health sector in Bhutan now faces.

While we have made progress in many areas, evidenced by a continuous decline in several communicable diseases and maternal and infant mortality rates, and in increased longevity, we are now faced with new challenges brought about by concurrent socioeconomic and demographic changes, rural-to-urban migration, and alterations in the lifestyles adopted by our people, as well as climate and environmental changes. These have contributed to changing the disease patterns among the Bhutanese population – today many more of our people are affected by noncommunicable diseases, which now account for over two thirds of the disease burden in Bhutan.

The Royal Government of Bhutan remains committed to maintaining free health services for all our citizens, in accordance with our Constitution. Our health system is strongly anchored on the principles of universal health coverage and equitable access to quality health care for all our citizens. The health-sector aspects of the *11th Five Year Plan* aim, through several initiatives, to realize and sustain this goal. We are aware that our commitment to this goal cannot be met without both technical and financial support from our key development partners. While we continue to maintain high national budgetary allocations for the health sector, much needs to be done to overcome the gaps in our health system, such as shortages of skilled health personnel, and inadequacies in infrastructure, in the face of rising costs for health care. While we continue to build the capacity of our health system to meet our myriad challenges, WHO will continue to be a key partner working with us on strategies and plans to tackle these challenges.

I am glad to note that the *WHO Country Cooperation Strategy Bhutan 2014–2018* is fully aligned with the current situation of the country and the strategic directions and key results of the *11th Five Year Plan* of the Royal Government of Bhutan. Our close collaboration over three decades has ensured that priorities are developed in harmony and in support of Bhutan’s overall development goals.

I am fully aware how essential our partnership with WHO is to meet the goals we have set for the health of our people. I congratulate the Organization for having prepared this plan in close collaboration with the Ministry of Health and other partners in Bhutan.

I warmly welcome this opportunity to endorse the new *WHO Country Cooperation Strategy Bhutan 2014–2018*. I am convinced that the implementation of the strategy will greatly benefit our people, as we rededicate ourselves to our common goal of further improving the health of the people of Bhutan.



H E Lyonpo Tandin Wangchuk
Minister of Health
Bhutan

Preface



The WHO (World Health Organization) *Country Cooperation Strategy Bhutan 2014–2018* serves to reinforce the strategic partnership between WHO and the Royal Government of Bhutan, and define a medium-term framework for technical cooperation with the health sector. It provides direction for WHO's work in Bhutan for the next 5 years, between 2014 and 2018, and will form the basis for the WHO biennial workplans for this period.

Bhutan has pursued free universal health coverage, based on the primary care approach, as the strategy for social protection and development. This has resulted in significant gains in the health status of the population, and commendable successes in the prevention and control of communicable diseases. The country is now well positioned to eliminate malaria, as well as several vaccine-preventable diseases, in the next few years. Commendable progress has similarly been made in improving maternal and child health. We are well aware that Bhutan is well on track to meet and sustain the health-related targets set under the Millennium Development Goals.

We are equally aware, however, that rapid demographic, social, environmental and consequent epidemiological transitions, have resulted in new challenges for the health sector, posing a triple burden on the health system. Bhutan is yet to overcome the several communicable diseases still prevalent in the country, as evidenced by outbreaks of dengue and new infections of HIV and tuberculosis, as well as tropical

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