

Health Systems Assessment Approach: A How-To Manual

Understanding health systems

As the global community continues to scale up HIV/AIDS, tuberculosis, malaria, and maternal and child health services in low-resource countries, it is giving increased attention to the country health systems that are expected to deliver these services. It is widely acknowledged that a weak health system constrains the expansion and sustainability of health service provision. A thorough understanding of a health system's institutional and organizational assets and limitations is needed to design appropriate interventions to strengthen it, and to advocate for it with national and international counterparts.

The recently developed *Health Systems Assessment Approach: A How-To Manual* fills a gap in assessment approaches by providing a tool that examines multiple health system components, synthesizes the data compiled, and guides users in transforming findings into specific strategies that policymakers and program managers can apply to strengthen their country's health system.

Health Systems Assessment Approach

The *Health Systems Assessment Approach: A How-To Manual* was inspired by health care practitioners and program managers seeking to strengthen a health system to improve delivery of priority health services, yet with limited resources to carry out a system assessment. The *Health Systems Assessment Approach* leads a small (3-4 person) team through a rapid and user-friendly yet comprehensive health system assessment: planning the assessment, gathering data, synthesizing findings,

generating recommendations, organizing a stakeholder workshop to discuss findings and plan future actions, and preparing the assessment report. Complementing the manual is the recently released *Health Systems Database* (see box on page 2), which replaces the data provided with the manual.

The *Health Systems Assessment Approach* is organized around technical modules that guide data collection on:

- Governance
- Financing
- Service delivery
- Human resources
- Pharmaceutical management
- Health information systems



Brief



Use of all technical modules produces a comprehensive assessment. Nevertheless, the tool's approach is flexible – if a country's needs are more focused, the assessment can comprise only selected modules. A mandatory core module provides background information on the country's health system.

Each technical module uses an indicator-based approach, and groups its indicators into two components: Component 1 contains indicators for which data are already available from internationally comparable datasets. (These data can be easily accessed using the *Health Systems Database*.) Component 2 includes quantitative and qualitative indicators gleaned from country-level document review and stakeholder interviews. These indicators allow users to gauge the functioning of that technical area and its contribution to overall health system performance, and to identify specific strengths and weaknesses. The manual provides guidance in using the findings to develop system strengthening interventions.

How is the tool used?

As explained above, the *Health Systems Assessment Approach* can be used to analyze the entire health system or particular aspects of the system. It also can be tailored to specific initiatives or diseases, such as HIV/AIDS, TB, malaria, or maternal and child health. Assessment findings also can be used to support proposals and requests for funding.

The *Health Systems Assessment Approach* has been applied in a number of countries: In Angola, assessment findings informed the USAID Mission's design of a new project. An assessment performed in Southern Sudan was meant to contribute to an application for GAVI Alliance funding for health system strengthening.

The tool also has been used in Azerbaijan, Benin, and Vietnam.

The *Health Systems Assessment Approach: A How-To Manual* is the result of a successful collaboration among its development partners: Health Systems 20/20, Partners for Health Reformplus (PHRplus), the Quality Assurance Project (QAP), and Rational Pharmaceutical Management (RPM) Plus. The manual and related documents can be downloaded at: <http://healthsystems2020.org/content/resources/detail/528/>

Health Systems Database

<http://healthsystems2020.healthsystemsdatabase.org>

The *Health Systems Database* is an easy-to-use Web-based tool that compiles and analyzes country data, allowing you to quickly assess the performance of a country's health system and compare it with peer countries in the region and income group.

The database closely mirrors the framework and quantitative analysis of the *Health Systems Assessment Approach: A How-To Manual*, and provides indicator data drawn from publicly available databases of the World Bank, World Health Organization, and UNICEF.

The *Health Systems Database* allows you to:

- Customize and download your own datasets.
- Create your own bar charts, scatter plots, and times series charts.
- Create maps displaying up to two indicators.
- Generate automated country reports, *Health Systems Fact Sheets*.

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