

Health policy

refers to decisions, plans, and actions that are undertaken to achieve specific health care goals within a society. An explicit health policy can achieve several things: it defines a vision for the future, outlines priorities and the expected roles of different groups; and it builds consensus and informs people.

A **health system**, also referred to as **health care system** or as **healthcare system**, is the organization of people, institutions, and resources that deliver health care services to meet the health needs of target populations.

There is a wide variety of health systems around the world. Implicitly, nations must design and develop health systems in accordance with their needs and resources, although common elements in virtually all health systems are primary healthcare and public health measures. In some countries, health system planning is distributed among market participants. In others, there is a concerted effort among governments, trade unions, charities, religious organizations, or other co-ordinated bodies to deliver planned health care services targeted to the population they serve. As with other social institutional structures, health systems are likely to reflect the history, culture and economics of the states in which they evolve.

The World Health Organization (WHO), the directing and coordinating authority for health within the United Nations system, is promoting a goal of **universal health care**: to ensure that all people obtain the health services they need without suffering financial hardship when paying for them.

Healthcare providers are institutions or individuals providing healthcare services. Individuals including health professionals and allied health professions can be self-employed or working as an employee in a hospital, clinic, or other health care institution, whether government operated, private for-profit, or private not-for-profit (e.g. non-governmental organization). They may also work outside of direct patient care such as in a government health department or other agency, medical laboratory, or health training institution. Examples of health workers are doctors, nurses, midwives, dietitians, paramedics, dentists, medical laboratory technologists, therapists, psychologists, pharmacists, chiropractors, optometrists, community health workers, traditional medicine practitioners, and others.

There are generally five **primary methods of funding** health systems:

- 1) general taxation to the state, county or municipality
- 2) national health insurance
- 3) voluntary or private health insurance
- 4) out-of-pocket payments
- 5) donations to charities

Most countries' systems feature some sort of mix of these five models.

The modern concept of healthcare involves access to medical professionals from various fields as well as medical technology, such as medications and surgical equipment. It also

involves access to the latest information and evidence from research, including medical research and health services research.

Many governments around the world have established universal health care, which takes the burden of healthcare expenses off of private businesses or individuals through pooling of financial risk.

In many countries it is left to the individual to gain access to healthcare goods and services by paying for them directly as out-of-pocket expenses, and to private sector players in the medical and pharmaceutical industries to develop research.