

# HEALTH SYSTEM STRENGTHENING (HSS)

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## What You Should Know

**Health system strengthening comprises the policies and processes that improve equity, efficiency, quality, accessibility, or effectiveness within the health system.** Health system strengthening (HSS) spans from the national to the community level and is central to countries' self-reliance. With a strong health system, countries can provide care for their citizens to thrive and engage in education and productive work that spurs economic development. U.S. resources focused on HSS amplify the impact of countries' own domestic resources and optimize the impact of other U.S. health investments.

**Strong health systems provide access to affordable, essential, and quality services for all.** Health systems are the institutions, resources, and people focused on improving health—including hospitals, health

workers, pharmaceuticals, supplies, governance structures, and financial and information systems. These systems bolster pandemic preparedness and response (PPR), reduce prolonged economic hardship, and provide high-quality, accessible, and affordable services to all, including vulnerable individuals and communities.

**Resilient health systems promote global health security.** Strong and resilient health systems promote American national security and global health security by ensuring that emerging health threats are detected early, disease outbreaks are contained, and pandemics are prevented, while ensuring the continuity of existing essential healthcare at all times.

## Congressional Calls to Action

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### **Require a 10% minimum of global health program funds be spent on HSS.**

Mandate that all future global health investments and programs help strengthen partner country primary healthcare systems, scaling their capacity to deliver essential, quality health services to all communities. Investments should focus on advancing health equity, quality, efficient, and effective use of resources—allowing every individual to access high-quality and affordable essential health services when they need them to attain the highest level of health.

### **Encourage the U.S. government to integrate local community participation into HSS approaches.**

Community participation is essential to well-functioning health systems. The U.S. government should actively include local communities in decision-making around HSS, particularly through social-accountability mechanisms.

### **Advise the U.S. government to prioritize HSS in global health security and PPR strategies.**

By putting HSS at the heart of global health security and PPR programming, countries will be able to better prevent or stop outbreaks closer to the source, reducing negative outcomes and limiting economic and social hardships associated with epidemic and pandemic events. As the foundation of HSS, it is imperative that primary healthcare systems, with an adequately staffed health workforce, be included in all global health security and PPR strategies.

## Why is this investment important?

With improved technologies and sustained investments, significant strides have been made to strengthen health systems globally and reduce deaths due to preventable causes. However, COVID-19 placed unprecedented stress on health systems and is reversing improvements made over the last decade. For example, routine childhood vaccination—a stalwart of a strong health system—declined in 2021, with 25 million infants missing out on lifesaving vaccines.<sup>1</sup> Severe inequities in access to health services, critical gaps in access to qualified health workers, weak information systems, irregular supply chains, inadequate public financing for health, and weak and non-functional governance structures are further impacting low- and middle-income countries.<sup>2</sup>

HSS efforts can address these challenges by focusing on access to safe medicines, increasing capacity to detect and contain infectious disease threats; strengthening financial management systems; and training and equipping frontline health workers, including community health workers, to deliver essential services. Additionally, investments in HSS have multiplier effects that enhance inclusive economic growth and create a path toward systems that provide timely and financially accessible essential health services.<sup>3</sup> As the U.S. government continues to promote health system sustainability and self-reliance in low- and middle-income countries, HSS will continue to be a priority.



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## Resources

Global Health Security Strategy (Office of the U.S. President, 2019): <https://www.whitehouse.gov/wp-content/uploads/2019/05/GHSS.pdf>

Recommendations for Strengthening Health Systems during the COVID-19 Pandemic and Beyond (USAID): <https://www.usaid.gov/global-health/health-systems-innovation/health-systems/resources/recommendations%20for-strengthening-health-systems-during-covid-19>

Vision for Health Systems Strengthening (USAID): <http://bit.ly/2DDoZWS>

## Contributors

Dr. Stella Kanyerere, Living Goods

Richard Kintu, Last Mile Health

Sarah Lindsay, Living Goods

## Citations

1. World Health Organization (WHO). “WHO and UNICEF sound the alarm as new data shows global vaccination coverage continued to decline in 2021, with 25 million infants missing out on lifesaving vaccines.” 15 July 2022. <https://www.who.int/news/item/15-07-2022-covid-19-pandemic-fuels-largest-continued-backslide-in-vaccinations-in-three-decades>
2. WHO. “Tracking universal health coverage: 2021 global monitoring report.” WHO/World Bank Group. <https://www.who.int/publications/i/item/9789240040618>
3. WHO. “Working for health and growth: Investing in the health workforce.” 2016. <http://bit.ly/2KfxCql>.