

Why Renew Primary Health Care?

The World Health Organization championed primary health care (PHC) even before 1978, when it adopted the approach as central to the achievement of the goal of "Health for All." Since that time, the world—and PHC with it—has changed dramatically. The purpose of renewing PHC is to revitalize countries' capacity to mount a coordinated, effective, and sustainable strategy to tackle existing health problems, prepare for new health challenges, and improve equity. The goal of such an endeavor is to obtain sustainable health gains for all.

There are several reasons for adopting a renewed approach to PHC, including: the rise of new epidemiologic challenges that PHC must evolve to address; the need to correct weaknesses and inconsistencies present in some of the widely divergent approaches to PHC; the development of new tools and knowledge of best practices that PHC can capitalize on to be more effective; a growing recognition that PHC is an approach to strengthen society's ability to reduce inequities in health; and a growing consensus that PHC represents a powerful approach to addressing the causes of poor health and inequality.

A renewed approach to PHC is viewed as an essential condition for meeting internationally agreed-upon development goals such as those contained in the United Nations Millennium Declaration (the Millennium Development Goals or MDGs), as well as to address the fundamental causes of health as articulated by the WHO Commission on Social Determinants of Health, and to codify health as a human right as articulated by some national constitutions, civil society groups, and others.



Pan American Health Organization

*Regional Office of the
World Health Organization*

PAHO/WHO
525 Twenty-Third Street NW
Washington, D.C. 20037
202-974-3284
www.paho.org

Renewing Primary Health Care in the Americas

**Pan American Health
Organization/World Health
Organization (PAHO/WHO)**



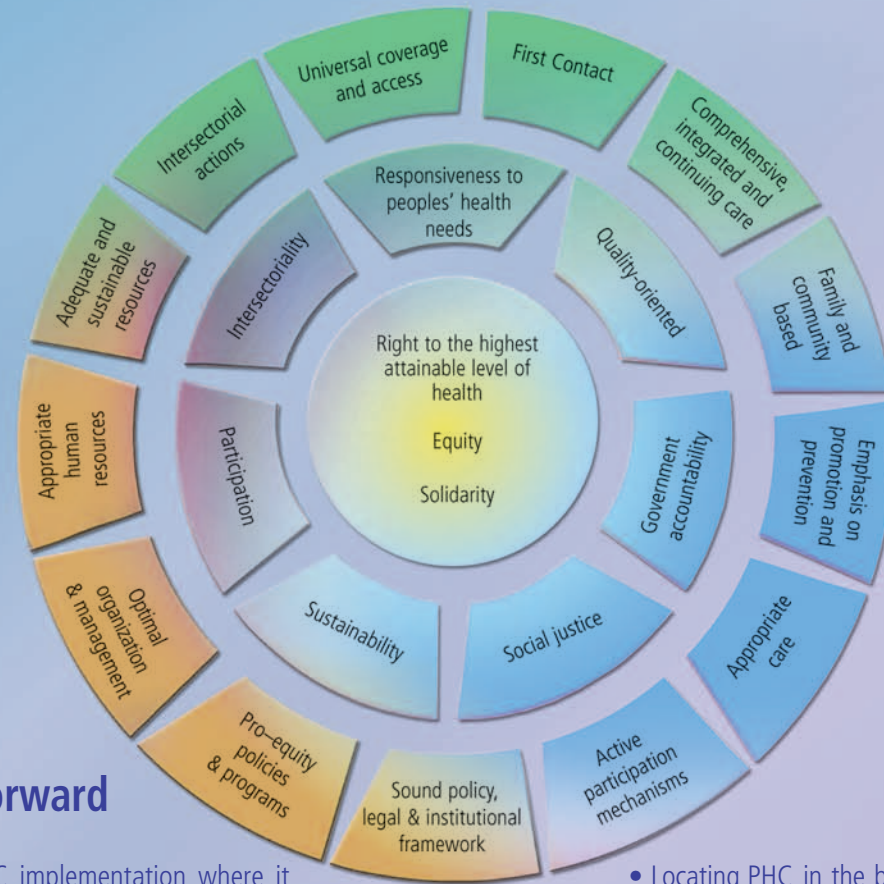
Building Primary Health Care–Based Health Systems

The position of the Pan American Health Organization is that PHC renewal must be an integral part of health systems development and that basing health systems on PHC is the best approach for producing sustained and equitable improvement in the health of the peoples of the Americas.

We define a PHC–based health system as an overarching approach to the organization and operation of health systems that makes the right to the highest attainable level of health its main goal while maximizing equity and solidarity. Such a system is guided by the PHC principles of responsiveness to people’s health needs, quality orientation, government accountability, social justice, sustainability, participation, and intersectorality.

A PHC–based health system is composed of a core set of functional and structural elements that guarantee universal coverage and access to services that are acceptable to the population and that are equity–enhancing. It provides comprehensive, integrated, and appropriate care over time, emphasizes health promotion and prevention, and assures first contact care. Families and communities are its basis for planning and action. A PHC–based health system requires a sound legal, institutional, and organizational foundation as well as adequate and sustainable human, financial, and technological resources. It employs optimal organization and management practices at all levels to achieve quality, efficiency, and effectiveness and develops active mechanisms to maximize individual and collective participation in health. A PHC–based health system develops intersectoral actions to address determinants of health and equity.

The Core Values, Principles and Elements in a PHC–Based Health System



The Way Forward

- Completing PHC implementation where it has failed (the unfinished health agenda) by: guaranteeing all citizens the right to health and universal access; actively promoting equity in health; and promoting absolute improvements in, as well as better distribution of, health and quality of life indicators;
- Locating PHC in the broader agenda of equity and human development by: linking PHC renewal with efforts to strengthen health systems, promoting sustainable improvements in community participation and intersectoral collaboration, and investing in human resource development.
- Strengthening PHC to address new challenges by: improving citizen and community satisfaction with services and providers; improving the quality of care and management; and strengthening the policy, environment, and institutional structures necessary for the successful fulfilment of all functions of the health system; and

This will require learning from past experience (both positive and negative), developing a strategy for advocacy and articulating the expected roles and responsibilities of countries, international organizations, and civil society groups involved in the renewal process.