



BELIZE NATIONAL HUMAN RESOURCES FOR UNIVERSAL HEALTH POLICY

2025-2029

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Foreword

The Belize National Human Resource for Universal Health Policy (HRHP) represents a pivotal response to the ongoing challenges faced in our health system. This document embodies our commitment to ensuring that every Belizean has access to quality healthcare, underscored by the recognition that our workforce is our greatest asset.

The journey to a sustainable healthcare system requires active engagement from multiple stakeholders, including government agencies, health professionals, civil society organizations, and international partners. In crafting this policy, we have deliberately sought to integrate diverse perspectives and forge a collaborative approach that honors the unique challenges and opportunities within the context of Belize. Through participatory strategies, we are not only addressing critical gaps in human resources but also ensuring that our initiatives align with both national priorities and global health standards.

The HRHP is not merely a policy; it is a dynamic framework designed to enhance the capacities of our health workforce, fostering an environment where knowledge, skills, and compassion converge to meet the evolving health needs of our communities. We believe that by investing in our people, expanding educational opportunities, and promoting interprofessional collaboration, we can cultivate a resilient health sector that is well-prepared to adapt to emerging health crises and demographic shifts.

This policy outlines our shared vision for a health system that upholds the principles of equity, dignity, and respect for all individuals.

Executive Summary

The Belize National Human Resource for Universal Health Policy (HRHP) serves as a strategic framework crafted to tackle the urgent challenges within the health sector, focusing specifically on the planning, management, training, and distribution of healthcare professionals. Below is a brief overview of each section outlined in the policy's Table of Contents:

Introduction: This section introduces the HRHP, emphasizing its significance in enhancing the health system's capacity to provide quality, equitable, and accessible universal health coverage (UHC) for all Belizeans. It aligns with national and international health development goals, showcasing the policy's focus on nursing as a primary workforce.

Justification and Important Assumptions: Here, the policy outlines the necessity of a skilled health workforce, noting key assumptions regarding government commitment, legal frameworks, community engagement, and the educational sector's involvement in addressing health challenges.

Background and Context for the National Policy: This section reviews the broader regulatory and regional healthcare landscape, identifying challenges in human resources management and the specific context of Belize's healthcare system.

Regulatory Framework: It discusses the legal structure guiding the health system, including relevant legislation that governs medical practice, training, and the management of healthcare professionals, establishing a foundation for effective policy implementation.

Regional Context of Belize: This part highlights the broader Caribbean and Central American challenges in health workforce management, addressing issues like urban migration of healthcare workers and the need for policy coherence across countries in the region.

National Context: This section reflects on Belize's recent health initiatives aimed at achieving UHC, noting the integration of human resources into national strategies to enhance service delivery, in light of ongoing challenges, particularly in rural areas.

Values and Guiding Principles: The policy is anchored in fundamental values such as equity, quality, dignity, collaboration, respect, and adaptability, ensuring that health services promote human rights and equity across all populations.

Rationality of the Policy: This section presents the theoretical justification for the HRHP, emphasizing the critical link between effective workforce management and improved health outcomes, supported by scientific literature and best practices.

Objectives of the Policy: The HRHP outlines four strategic objectives designed to enhance governance, workforce capacity, interprofessional collaboration, and retention strategies aimed at improving overall health service delivery.

Strategic Objectives: Detailed actions and initiatives are proposed to improve governance and regulation of human resources, develop workforce capacity—particularly in nursing—

encourage interprofessional collaboration, and enhance working conditions for health personnel.

Implementation Plan for the National Human Resources for Universal Health Policy in Belize:

This final section outlines a comprehensive action plan for executing the policy, including the establishment of a cohesive vision, alignment of strategies, resource mobilization, regulatory oversight, stakeholder engagement, and continuous monitoring and evaluation to ensure effectiveness and adaptability.

The successful execution of the HRHP is essential for developing a resilient health workforce that can meet the demands of Belize's healthcare system. By supporting innovative solutions and fostering collaboration throughout the sector, Belize aims to enhance health service delivery, ultimately improving health outcomes for all its citizens and contributing to the nation's sustainable development.

List of Acronyms

APN - Advanced Practice Nurse

CARICOM - Caribbean Community

CDC - Centers for Disease Control and Prevention

GOB - Government of Belize

HRH - Human Resources for Health

HRHP - Human Resource for Universal Health Policy

HRHSP - Human Resources for Health Strategic Plan

HRHSP 2025-2029 - Human Resources for Health Strategic Plan 2025-2029

MPA - Medical Practitioner Act

MoHW - Ministry of Health and Wellness

NHI - National Health Insurance

HRHP - Human Resources for Health Policy

NMA - Nursing and Midwifery Act

PAHO - Pan American Health Organization

PHC - Primary Health Care

PHA - Public Health Act

SDGs - Sustainable Development Goals

SICA - Central American Integration System

UHC - Universal Health Coverage

WHO - World Health Organization

Acknowledgements

The development of the Belize National Human Resource for Universal Health Policy (HRHP) has been a collaborative effort that reflects the commitment and dedication of numerous stakeholders across various sectors. We would like to express our gratitude to all those who contributed to the formulation of this vital policy.

First and foremost, we extend our appreciation to the Ministry of Health and Wellness (MoHW) for its leadership in guiding this process, showcasing their unwavering commitment to promoting high-quality healthcare for all Belizeans.

We are particularly thankful for the active participation of various stakeholders, including healthcare professionals, civil society organizations and academic institutions. Their insights, expertise, and perspectives have been invaluable in shaping a policy that addresses the specific challenges and realities faced in our health system.

Special thanks are also due to the various governmental bodies and local authorities who engaged in consultations, sharing their perspectives and ensuring that the policy reflects a comprehensive understanding of the health landscape in Belize.

Introduction

The Belize National Human Resource for Universal Health Policy (HRHP) is a fundamental strategic instrument designed to address the current challenges in the health sector planning, management, training, and distribution of human resources. It particularly focuses on nursing, considering the specific characteristics of Belize's health system, where nursing professionals are the primary human resource regarding quantity and availability.

This policy aims to strengthen the health system to ensure high-quality, equitable, and accessible universal health coverage (UHC) for the entire population. It aligns with national and international development plans, such as Belize's Medium-Term Development Strategy 2022-2026, the Belize Health Sector Strategic Plan 2014-2024, the Belize Health Sector Strategic Plan 2025-2034, and global guidelines from the World Health Organization (WHO) and the Pan American Health Organization (PAHO), including the Caribbean Roadmap 2025-2030 and the Global Strategy on Human Resources for Health: Health Workforce 2030.

The main objective of the HRHP is to improve health outcomes by ensuring a resilient, motivated, and competent workforce able to respond effectively to the population's healthcare needs.

The Ministry of Health and Wellness (MoHW) led the development process of the HRHP with the participation of various stakeholders, including civil society organizations, the private sector, and relevant international partners. This participatory approach enabled the integration of multiple perspectives and the adaptation of strategies to local realities and needs. The policy is based on a comprehensive analysis of the current human resources situation in health, addressing specific challenges encountered in the Health System, such as equitable distribution of personnel, retention of healthcare workers in underserved areas, and the continuous improvement of health personnel training.

The strategies outlined in the HRHP are founded on principles of social justice, equity, respect for human rights, and individual dignity. These proposal aims to enhance governance and leadership in the management of human resources for health. Furthermore, the policy recognizes the need to coordinate and articulate efforts among different sectors of government and society, promoting a comprehensive and multisectoral approach to improved health services.

The implementation of the HRHP is essential for leading the transformation of the health system in Belize. It ensures that the population has access to quality and equitable health services, thereby contributing to the well-being of the country and its sustainable development.

The development of this policy is guided by the context of the Latin America and Caribbean region, where addressing health inequalities and strengthening health systems require a multifaceted approach. It recognizes the necessity of robust human resources systems that prioritize the retention of health professionals in the region, promote equitable access to health services and address the unique challenges faced by countries in the region.

Justification and Important Assumptions

Healthcare workers are essential to the functioning and resilience of any health system. The World Health Organization defines human resources for health as all individuals engaged in activities primarily to enhance health. Whether in delivering health services, managing health systems, or addressing social determinants of health, these professionals operate within a complex, intersectoral framework dedicated to public health and the populations they serve.

Substantial evidence supports the critical link between the health workforce and population health outcomes. Healthcare workers' contributions are vital to these outcomes, making human resources for health indispensable for achieving Belize's National Health Goals. The "Global Strategy on Human Resources for Health: Workforce 2030" emphasizes the need of workforce planning to accelerate progress toward Universal Health Coverage and the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) by ensuring equitable access to health workers within robust health systems.

Belize faces significant health and human resources challenges, with a noticeable migration of highly skilled workers from rural to urban areas and from the public to the private sector¹. Additionally, regional and international migration exacerbates the human resources crisis. Addressing migration flow is crucial in mobilizing adequate health workforce to implement priority national programs that lead to the sustainable development of human resource capacities, a positive work environment, education and training initiatives, and supportive policies²

Several critical political, social, and economic assumptions must be considered as part of the HRHP to successfully implement the Human Resources for Health (HRH) strategies in Belize, the most relevant being:

1 Dal Poz, M.R., Sepulveda, H.R., Costa Couto, M.H. et al. Assessment of human resources for health programme implementation in 15 Latin American and Caribbean countries. *Hum Resour Health* 13, 24 (2015). <https://doi.org/10.1186/s12960-015-0016-4>

2 Witter, S., Hamza, M.M., Alazemi, N. et al. Human resources for health interventions in high- and middle-income countries: findings of an evidence review. *Hum Resour Health* 18, 43 (2020). <https://doi.org/10.1186/s12960-020-00484-w>

Continued Government Commitment

The Government of Belize (GOB) remains committed to prioritizing health sector reform, including strengthening human resources for health as a critical component of national health policy; to maintain stability in leadership within the Ministry of Health and Wellness, to provide ongoing support for health initiatives from other governmental bodies, and to foster active engagement and collaboration between different levels of government (national, regional, and local) to ensure coherent policy implementation.

Supportive Legal and Regulatory Environment

The existing legal and regulatory frameworks will support the changes proposed in the HRHSP, including reforms to labor laws, health worker protections, and professional standards.

Any necessary legislative changes, such as those related to health worker migration, task shifting, or new training programs, will be framed on Regional Cooperation.

Continued collaboration with regional bodies like the Pan American Health Organization (PAHO) for technical support and policy alignment, the Caribbean Community (CARICOM), and the Central American Integration System (SICA) is crucial for international cooperation and coordination in areas such as education, migration, and others. Support from international finance institutions shall be aligned with the policy and the Strategic plan for Human Resources for Universal Health.

Public and Community Engagement

There is sufficient public awareness and understanding of the importance of strengthening the health workforce, which will foster community support for the HRH Plan. Communities, especially in rural and underserved areas, are willing to engage with and support health initiatives, including participating in local health programs and accepting new healthcare workers.

Health Workforce Acceptance

The current health workforce is receptive to the changes proposed in the HRH Plan, including new training programs, task-shifting initiatives, and the introduction of digital health tools.

Healthcare workers, including those in remote areas, are motivated to stay in their positions provided improvements in working conditions and benefits are implemented.

Educational Sector Involvement:

Educational institutions, notably the University of Belize and other training centers, are prepared to align their curricula with the national health workforce needs and expand capacity to meet the demand for new healthcare, person-, family-, and community-oriented cadres and interprofessional teams.

Sufficient Funding and Resource Allocation:

The Government of Belize allocates adequate budgetary resources to health, specifically focusing on financing HRH initiatives.

International donors and development partners continue to provide financial and technical support for health workforce development in Belize.

Economic stability in the country allows for the continuous funding of health programs without significant budget cuts or reallocations.

Economic Growth and Employment

Belize experiences stable or positive economic growth, which supports job creation and the availability of funds for public sector salaries, including those for health workers.

The health sector remains a priority area for public and private investment, potentially leading to job creation and improved retention of skilled health professionals.

Impact of Global Health Trends

The global health landscape remains stable, with no significant pandemics, climate, economic, or health crises that could significantly disrupt the implementation of the HRH Plan.

International health policies, such as those related to universal health coverage (UHC), continue to align with Belize's health goals, providing additional support for the HRH Plan.

Technological Advancements

Adopting digital health technologies and other innovations is feasible within the current infrastructure, and there is sufficient training and capacity to integrate these technologies into the health system effectively.

These assumptions are critical for the successful implementation of the HRHP and the HRHSP 2025-2029. If any of these assumptions do not hold, it could impact the plan's effectiveness and require strategy or resource allocation adjustments.

A vital component of this strategy involves increasing the capacity of local training institutions to produce a sufficient and well-prepared healthcare workforce. By aligning educational programs and institutions with the national health workforce plan, Belize can ensure that all stakeholders work towards the same goals, effectively addressing the population's current and future health needs. Investment in human resources for health is fundamental to public health practices and has been shown to improve employment rates and stimulate economic growth.

In Belize, inequities persist in the health workforce's availability, distribution, and quality. These challenges are exacerbated by low retention rates in rural and underserved areas, high mobility and migration, precarious working conditions, low productivity, and performance issues, all of which hinder the expansion of health services, particularly at the primary care level. Even when health workers are available, they may only sometimes possess the necessary skills or be situated in the right place at the right time to effectively serve the communities in need. The role of the health workforce in enhancing the resilience of communities and health systems is undeniable.

The COVID-19 pandemic has further underscored these challenges, highlighting vulnerabilities within Belize's health system and exacerbating the strain on human resources for health. As the nation moves into the post-pandemic period, addressing these challenges becomes even more critical. The HRHSP 2025-2029 must continue to address the long-standing issues and adapt to the new realities and demands placed on the health system by the pandemic. This plan will need to focus on building a resilient workforce capable of responding to current and future health crises, ensuring that Belize's health system remains robust and capable of meeting the needs of its population in an increasingly uncertain global health landscape.

Background and context for the national policy

This section delves into several critical dimensions of the context surrounding this policy, including the regulatory framework that governs healthcare, the regional challenges faced in human resources management, and the national strategies aimed at enhancing the health system's capacity. Examining these elements provides a clearer understanding of the complex dynamics influencing the development of human resources in health, along with the associated challenges and opportunities for improvement. This context not only informs the key strategies within the policy but also highlights the collaborative efforts necessary for achieving the goal of universal health coverage in Belize.

The following subsections provide insights into the regulatory framework overseeing health services, outline the regional context of Belize's healthcare challenges, and examine the national initiatives that shape the health workforce landscape, all of which are essential for the successful implementation of the HRH Policy.

Regulatory Framework

The Constitution of Belize, enacted in 1981, symbolizes the nation's transition to independence, laying a framework that prioritizes health as a fundamental right. It emphasizes equitable access to health services and the reduction of disparities, positioning health as a cornerstone of social development. The preamble highlights the importance of nondiscriminatory care, while specific articles permit reasonable restrictions on rights to protect public health during emergencies. For example, Article 18 allows a state of emergency to address health crises, granting the government authority for decisive action. Complementing the Constitution, the Public Health Act establishes legal guidelines for managing health services, sanitation, infectious disease control, and other public health matters under the oversight of the Director of Health Services and the Central Health Council.

The Thie MoHW role of reducing out-of-pocket payments encompasses the coordination of essential resources, both physical and human, necessary for the functioning of the health system. Investment in human resources is fundamental, as the system's performance relies heavily on the knowledge and skills of health personnel.

Belize's health system includes public and private sectors, with most of the population relying on public services, particularly the poor. The Ministry of Health and Wellness receives funding from public revenue, enabling it to provide free medical services in the primary and secondary levels of care. Additionally, it supervises the national reference laboratory, the Central Medical Laboratory, which offers free laboratory tests, including dengue testing.

The Belize Human Resources for Health Strategic Plan (HRHSP) 2019-2024 establishes five strategic objectives to enhance the health system's capacity. These objectives focus on strengthening leadership and governance in human resources, addressing inequities in the availability and distribution of health personnel, and increasing investment in human resource development. The plan also emphasizes improving education and training for health personnel and promoting cooperation and partnerships across different sectors to respond effectively to the health system's needs.

Several laws regulate the development of the healthcare system, specifically concerning human resources for health (HRH). These include the Medical Practitioner Act, the Nursing and Midwifery Act, and the Public Health Act. These laws provide a legal framework for regulating medical practice, training, and certification of health personnel while ensuring compliance with care standards.

This analysis aims to provide an overview of the regulatory framework and to guide the implementation of specific regulations that align with the established objectives for human resources performance in the health system of Belize.

Regional Context of Belize

Belize is part of both the Caribbean and Central American subregions, which face significant challenges in planning and managing Human Resources for Health (HRH). In several countries within the area, including Belize, the availability, distribution, and quality of health personnel are critical issues that require urgent attention. While efforts have been made to enhance training and staffing at the primary care level, inequities in geographic distribution and shortages of qualified personnel persist, disproportionately affecting rural and underserved communities.

The regional context is characterized by an increasing concentration of health professionals in urban areas, exacerbating the situation in rural regions. Furthermore, the expansion of labor markets has intensified the migration of healthcare workers to more developed countries, further complicating efforts to retain skilled personnel within the region. Precarious working conditions, including low salaries, a lack of professional development opportunities, and insufficient investment in health infrastructure compound this challenge.

The Pan American Health Organization (PAHO) report "Strengthening Human Resources for Health in the Caribbean" highlights that, despite progress in some areas, the region continues to struggle with implementing HRH policies that align with the actual needs of health systems based on Primary Health Care (PHC). Disparities in remuneration between medical and non-medical professionals and among different levels of care present obstacles to equity and efficiency within the health system.

In Belize, these regional challenges are evident in the urgent need to enhance leadership capacity and governance in HRH management, improve the deployment and retention of health personnel in underserved areas, and ensure that health services are accessible and of high quality for the entire population. Integrating innovative approaches, such as establishing simulation laboratories for nursing education and aligning curricula with regional standards, are vital steps to address these needs in light of regional challenges.

This regional context underscores the importance of developing and implementing a national HRH policy in Belize that responds to local needs and aligns with international strategies and frameworks, such as the WHO's Human Resources for Health Strategy 2020-2030. Collaboration among countries in the region, strengthening governance, and investing in the training and retention of health personnel are essential to overcoming current barriers and improving health outcomes in Belize and across the Caribbean region.

National Context

In the national context, Belize has made significant strides in the planning and management of Human Resources for Health (HRH), aimed at achieving universal health coverage that ensures equitable access to quality services. These initiatives are framed within national strategies such as the Belize Medium-Term Development Plan 2022-2026 and the Health Sector Strategic Plan 2014-2024, which have been essential for guiding government health policies and projects.

The Belize Medium-Term Development Plan 2022-2026 seeks to transform Belize into a more inclusive, sustainable, and resilient society, with a strong emphasis on improving the quality of life for all Belizeans. This plan includes critical projects in the health sector, such as expanding the National Health Insurance (NHI) to achieve universal primary care and investing in the training of medical and nursing personnel. However, significant challenges remain, particularly in the equitable distribution of health personnel in rural and underserved areas, as well as in the retention and continuous training of staff.

The Health Sector Strategic Plan 2014-2024 has been a cornerstone in enhancing the efficiency and equity of the health system. This plan advocates for a person-centered approach based on Primary Health Care (PHC), aiming to integrate services that are accessible, affordable, and of high quality. Nevertheless, effective implementation of these policies faces obstacles due to the fragmentation of health services and the lack of a robust legal framework that comprehensively regulates labor conditions in the sector.

The new Health Sector Strategic Plan 2025-2034 will further consolidate the essential public health function of strengthening human resources, in the context of strengthening the assessment, policy formulation, resource allocation (including HRH), and access to quality healthcare capacities of the sector.

The insufficient and inequitable development of Human Resources for Health is evident in the shortage of qualified personnel in primary care units and the lack of specialized family medicine practitioners and community agents, which limits the health system's responsiveness. Moreover, the absence of a clearly defined career pathway and disparities in working conditions across different health subsystems contribute to the prevalence of secondary employment and the inequitable distribution of HRH in Belize.

Strengthening human resources in health is critical for developing a more robust and resilient healthcare system in Belize. A comprehensive national policy that addresses these challenges is essential to ensure health services are accessible and of high-quality standards for the entire population, thereby contributing to sustainable development goals and the overall well-being of the nation.

During the COVID-19 pandemic, Belize implemented a multifaceted and inclusive response to address the challenges related to HRH. To tackle the shortage of personnel, the country prioritized the recruitment of 230 additional community health workers, facilitated by collaboration among the Ministries of Health, Public Service, and Finance, despite a hiring

freeze and a significant budget cut. Additionally, services were reorganized to allow for the reassignment of personnel to critical areas, temporarily suspending or reducing some non-essential services.

Incorporating approximately 500 volunteers was crucial for managing community quarantine centers and coordinating various logistical tasks. Bilateral agreements with the Cuban government led to the arrival of 121 doctors and nurses to complement local efforts in the management of intensive care and infectious diseases. Tasks were delegated to community health workers, who received training in essential care areas.

The private sector collaborated through agreements with Belize Healthcare Partners, providing support in service delivery and referrals. In light of the personnel shortage, 12-hour shifts were implemented in hospital settings, a measure that had already been in place before the pandemic. Furthermore, the participation of final-year nursing students was encouraged, strengthening collaboration between the academia and the health sector. Belize's response to the HRH challenges during the pandemic was characterized by inter-ministerial collaboration and international cooperation, which were crucial for the effectiveness of the response. The existence of a national HRH plan, although not fully implemented, also contributed to the country's capacity to react.

The recent opening of a medical school in Belize has the potential to transform the landscape of human resources in health. However, this change is expected to be gradual due to the limited enrollment capacity (approximately 15 spots), with the first cohort anticipated to be available in 2030, coinciding with the conclusion of the current document's scope.

Beyond mere enrollment numbers, this initiative will invigorate the training of health professionals and could influence government support for Belizean doctors seeking degrees abroad. An increase in the mobility of doctors within the country may prompt the government to facilitate and finance specialized training programs overseas, benefiting those studying abroad and encouraging their return with new skills and knowledge to enrich the local health system.

The medical school's opening may lead to a reassessment of foreign doctors' roles within the health system. As more Belizean doctors graduate, the dependence on foreign medical personnel will likely decrease. However, foreign professionals will continue to play a vital role in primary and specialized care, particularly in areas with high demand and limited local supply.

The increased production of doctors will also change the role of nurses, demanding new specializations. Nurses and Midwives are expected to focus on complementary areas such as advanced primary care and care management, collaborating effectively with the rising number of physicians. Advanced Practice Nurses (APNs) can be crucial, especially in rural communities with limited access to medical professionals. The development of APNs and highly trained midwives will enable them to take on additional responsibilities, thereby facilitating comprehensive medical practice.

Values and Guiding Principles

The fundamental values of the health system in Belize, such as the right to health, equality and non-discrimination, and the protection of human dignity, are enshrined in the Constitution of Belize. These principles are essential to ensure that all citizens have equitable access to health services, regardless of origin, gender, religion, or socioeconomic status. These are based on Human Rights in general and the Right to Health in particular, from which its central values and guiding principles are stated.

Values

The values that underpin the National Health Human Resources Policy for Belize are essential to fostering a robust and effective health system. These principles reflect the commitment to creating a health environment that prioritizes the needs of all citizens and ensures equitable access to quality healthcare services. By embedding equity, quality, dignity, collaboration, respect, and adaptability into the core framework of health policies and practices, Belize aims to address existing disparities and enhance the overall effectiveness and cost-efficiency of health service delivery. The following sections will detail these values, highlighting their significance in guiding the development and implementation of strategies designed to strengthen human resources for health and improve health outcomes for the Belizean population.

Equity

This principle focuses on ensuring that all citizens of Belize, regardless of geographic location, socioeconomic status, gender, or any other characteristic, have equitable access to quality health services. It involves designing policies and programs that eliminate barriers to accessing health care, especially in rural and underserved communities. Equity is essential to ensure that health disparities are addressed and that fair and universal access to health services is promoted.

Quality

Quality in providing health services is fundamental, ensuring that human resources are trained and motivated to offer practical, patient-centered services. This principle seeks to ensure that health services are not only accessible but also meet high standards of quality, safety, and efficiency. Continuous improvement of health workers' capabilities, updating clinical protocols, and constant performance evaluation are essential to maintaining and raising quality standards in the health system.

Dignity

This value underlines the importance of providing healthcare workers with decent, safe, and fair working conditions. It guarantees adequate wages, job security, professional development opportunities, and a work environment that respects labor rights. Decent working conditions

are crucial to attracting and retaining qualified health professionals, improving job satisfaction, and ultimately strengthening health service delivery.

Collaboration

Collaboration and inclusion focus on promoting a multisectoral and participatory approach in health policy planning and implementation. This principle highlights the importance of working with all actors involved, including governments, non-governmental organizations, communities, and the private sector. Promoting inclusion ensures that all voices are heard and that policies are designed considering the needs and perspectives of all groups in society, with particular attention to the most vulnerable.

Respect

Respect and promotion of people's rights are fundamental in providing health services. This value guarantees that all human resources actions respect basic human rights, such as the right to health, privacy, dignity, and non-discrimination. Health workers must be trained and sensitized to respect these rights daily, ensuring all patients' humane and respectful treatment.

Adaptability

In an ever-changing healthcare environment, innovation and adaptability are essential to practical answers to new challenges. This principle promotes the adoption of new technologies, innovative approaches in the education and training of health personnel, and the flexibility to adapt policies and practices to the changing needs of the health system. Fostering an environment that values innovation will allow Belize's health system to be better prepared to face future crises and continually improve its services.

Guiding principles

The Belize Health Human Resources Policy is based on fundamental principles that guide developing and managing a health workforce that meets the country's needs. These principles, aligned with constitutional values and the national regulatory framework, ensure that the policy guarantees equitable and universal access to high-quality health services.

Figure 1: Guiding Principles of the Comprehensive Policy on Human Resources for Health and Nursing



Rationality of the Policy

The need for a National Human Resources for Health Policy (HRHP) is grounded in various theories and empirical evidence highlighting the importance of effectively managing human resources within the health sector.

Firstly, health systems are regarded as complex structures that require adequate integration of human, financial, and material resources to operate effectively. According to the World Health Organization, an efficient health system must have a sufficient and well-distributed workforce trained to respond to the population's health needs. The HRHP aims to create a framework that optimizes the management of human talent within this system, ensuring compliance with quality and equity standards in health care.

Additionally, theoretical models such as the competency management approach and the triple dimension model of well-being promote creating a work environment conducive to employee motivation and retention. These models suggest that training, professional development, and the holistic well-being of personnel are essential for guaranteeing the quality of health services. The HRHP is based on these principles by proposing continuous training and personnel development strategies.

Furthermore, scientific literature has demonstrated a positive correlation between the quantity and quality of human resources in health and health outcomes within populations. Various studies indicate that a well-trained and motivated workforce enhances the effectiveness of health services and patient satisfaction. Therefore, establishing a human resources policy that strengthens these dimensions is crucial for improving public health in Belize.

Implementing this policy not only responds to a regulatory framework and principles of social justice but is also vital for addressing the current challenges within the health system, ensuring equity, and improving health outcomes for the entire population.

Objectives of the Policy

The National Human Resources for Health Policy aims to establish a clear and coherent framework that guides all actions related to personnel management in the health sector. Four strategic objectives have been formulated based on the national and international context analysis and the situational assessment to operationalize the policy's central purpose and serve as a foundation for planning from 2025 to 2029. These objectives will be reviewed in depth and constitute the starting point for the 2025-2029 Strategic Plan for Human Resources in Health.

Strategic Objectives

Within the Strategic Plan for Human Resources in Health for Belize 2025-2029 framework, the strategic objectives are essential for implementing initiatives to strengthen the country's health system. These objectives are designed to comprehensively address the existing challenges in managing human resources, fostering interprofessional collaboration, promoting continuous professional development, and improving governance and working conditions for health personnel. Achieving these objectives aims not only to enhance the capacity and quality of care provided by health professionals but also to ensure a work environment that fosters the retention and satisfaction of the workforce. Below are the strategic objectives that will direct efforts toward a more resilient and efficient health system in Belize.

Objective 1: Strengthen Governance and Regulatory Frameworks of Human Resources in Health

The primary objective is to improve the governance and regulatory frameworks that guide human resources for health (HRH) in Belize. Through a participatory approach, this initiative seeks to involve key stakeholders in reviewing and formulating policies that ensure accountability, standardization, and effective health workforce management. By reinforcing these frameworks, the goal is to create a legislative and operational environment that supports the strategic deployment and utilization of human resources, ultimately leading to improved health service delivery. To strengthen governance in HRH, policies, and regulations will be implemented to address critical areas such as issuing annual licenses, registration and accreditation of health professionals, and continuing education. Norms related to labor relations in both public and private sectors will also be established, alongside specific strategies for recruitment and retention of personnel. These regulations will not only facilitate the creation of a stable and equitable work environment but will also ensure that health professionals possess the necessary competencies to perform their roles effectively.

Objective 2: Enhance the Capacity of the Health Workforce and Professional Development, with Emphasis on Nursing

This objective focuses on advancing the capacity and professional development of the health workforce in Belize, with particular emphasis on the nursing profession. The initiative aims to identify the specific training needs of all health professionals while paying particular attention to nurses. Educational programs will be developed with health workers, academic institutions, and nursing associations. This commitment to continuous professional development seeks to equip the workforce with the latest skills and knowledge necessary to meet the evolving challenges within the health sector, thereby delivering high-quality care. By strengthening the competencies, leadership, and capacity of nursing staff, their central role in comprehensive health care will be ensured, significantly contributing to an effective response to the needs of the communities they serve. To improve the capacity of the health workforce, various exchange programs and scholarships need to be implemented to facilitate access to training experiences abroad. Additionally, creating new categories of health professionals addressing critical areas such as mental health, geriatric care, and family medicine will allow for more comprehensive and diverse healthcare delivery.

Objective 3: Strengthen Interprofessional Collaboration and Team Formation in Health Services Networks

This objective aims to promote robust interprofessional collaboration and establish effectively integrated teams within the health service networks in Belize. The initiative will foster the formation of interprofessional teams encompassing various health disciplines, including physicians, nurses, community health workers, and other professionals, ensuring practical cooperation in patient care. Through participatory methodologies and shared learning opportunities, communication and teamwork will be encouraged, enabling a more effective response to the complex needs of the health system. Moreover, efforts will be made to strengthen team dynamics and care coordination to provide a comprehensive approach to patient management. This synergistic approach is expected to improve health services and care outcomes, benefiting the general population and ensuring holistic, patient-centered care.

Objective 4: Improve the Retention of the Health Workforce and Working Conditions

This objective focuses on developing and implementing effective strategies to enhance the retention of the health workforce in Belize and continuously improve working conditions. This initiative seeks to identify critical factors influencing staff turnover and design tailored interventions that promote job satisfaction and professional well-being by engaging various stakeholders. Particular attention will be given to creating a positive working environment that recognizes and rewards health professionals' contributions while improving working conditions, such as workload management, work-life balance, and access to adequate resources. Through these strategies, it is anticipated that a competent and committed workforce will be retained, capable of providing high-quality and consistent medical care throughout 2025-2029.

To achieve this objective, priority will be given to creating a favorable working environment by implementing attractive incentives, such as preferential loans for vehicles, affordable mortgages, housing options in rural areas, and scholarships for continuous professional development. These measures will facilitate retaining existing personnel and attracting new talent to the health sector. Furthermore, there will be an emphasis on expanding training capacity, particularly in educating nurses, to meet the growing local demand.

These initiatives are expected to significantly strengthen the health workforce in Belize, ensuring an adequate supply of professionals capable of addressing the challenges within the health system. By fostering an environment that recognizes and rewards the contributions of healthcare workers, this strategic focus aims to enhance job satisfaction and professional commitment, ultimately leading to improved health outcomes for the population. The successful implementation of these strategies will be closely monitored and evaluated to ensure their effectiveness and allow for necessary adjustments, reinforcing the overall sustainability of Belize's health workforce development efforts.

Implementation Plan for the National Human Resources for Universal Health Policy in Belize

The successful implementation of the Belize National Human Resources for Universal Health Policy (HRHP) requires a cohesive and strategic approach. This plan outlines the necessary actions and activities to effectively carry out this policy, ensuring that the health workforce is adequately strengthened and managed to meet the health needs of the Belizean population.

1. Establishment of a Cohesive Vision

The initial step in implementing the HRHP is to ensure that all stakeholders have a unified understanding of the policy's vision and mission. This requires clearly defining long-term objectives that will guide the development of strategies and annual operational plans.

To achieve this, workshops and informational sessions will be organized to engage health sector leaders, community representatives, and other relevant actors, allowing each group to express their views and concerns.

Additionally, reference documents summarizing the policy and strategy will be developed and distributed among all involved stakeholders to ensure that everyone understands how their individual efforts contribute to the broader health system objectives.

2. Alignment and Coherence Among Strategies

The HRHP should serve as a guiding document for the development of the Human Resources Strategic Plan, ensuring that both documents are complementary. A clear implementation framework will be established, outlining the roles and responsibilities of each actor involved in the process. To facilitate alignment, protocols will be developed to guide interactions among different levels of the health system, allowing for the compilation of best practices and sharing of lessons learned.

3. Resource Mobilization and Financing

The effective implementation of the HRHP depends on the identification and mobilization of adequate resources. A comprehensive analysis of the financial requirements for priority activities—including education, training, infrastructure improvements, and salaries—will be conducted.

The Ministry of Health and Wellness (MoHW) will collaborate with international organizations and donors to secure appropriate funding, as well as establish strategic partnerships that allow for the creation of training and professional development programs. This will ensure that initiatives reflect international best practices.

A detailed financial plan will be developed, prioritizing investments in critical areas that will have the greatest impact on public health outcomes.

4. Regulation and Oversight

Establishing a robust regulatory framework is essential for ensuring compliance with the policy. A licensing and certification system will be implemented to ensure that health professionals meet established quality and competency standards.

Furthermore, clear standards for education and ongoing training of health professionals will be defined, ensuring that educational programs align with the current needs of the health system and adequately prepare future professionals.

Additionally, a monitoring and oversight system will be developed to periodically assess compliance with established regulations, ensuring that policy objectives are effectively met.

5. Stakeholder Engagement and Communication

Effective communication is vital for the success of the policy. A multifaceted approach will be fostered, involving all relevant stakeholders in the process—not just through information dissemination but also through constructive dialogue.

Public forums and consultations will be organized, allowing health workers, communities, and civil society organizations to share their opinions and ask questions regarding the implementation of the policy. This will promote transparency and create a sense of ownership among all parties involved.

6. Continuous Monitoring and Evaluation

The implementation of the HRHP will include a comprehensive monitoring and evaluation (M&E) framework that allows for systematic tracking of progress and effectiveness. Periodic evaluations will facilitate the identification of achievements and areas requiring adjustments.

Progress reports will be developed and shared with all stakeholders, ensuring accountability and allowing for the reinforcement of successful strategies as well as the correction of courses where needed.

7. Promotion of Innovation and Adaptation

The policy must foster an environment that encourages innovation in the management of human resources in health. As the HRHP is implemented, the adoption of new technologies and innovative approaches that can enhance the quality of care and operational efficiency will be encouraged.

Actions to be undertaken will include:

Training on New Technologies: Continuous training will be provided on the use of digital tools, telemedicine, and other advancements that facilitate healthcare delivery and management. The promotion of digital platforms to coordinate health services and improve access for the population will also be emphasized.

Research and Development: Support for health-related research that seeks to identify best practices and efficient models that can be applied within the Belizean context will be encouraged. Partnerships with universities and research centers will facilitate joint projects.

Flexibility in Implementation: The policy will incorporate mechanisms that allow for quick adaptation to changes in health contexts, be it due to emerging diseases, demographic shifts, or public health crises. This will ensure that the health system is prepared to face future challenges.