IntraHealth International views primary health care (PHC) as the path to achieving our vision: health care for everyone everywhere—and as an opportunity to apply our unique skillset in tackling health workforce and health systems challenges on the front lines of care.

**PROGRESS AND PROMISES**

Great progress has been made in global health since PHC was first declared as a global goal in 1978. Maternal and child mortality have decreased dramatically, thanks in large part to integrated PHC strategies. Increased use of modern contraception has saved lives—and contributed to socio-economic growth. The global community is making tremendous strides toward an AIDS-free generation. New technologies, medicines, and proven high-impact practices that can save lives have had a major impact. And the world’s population has greater access to information than ever before, thanks to the reach of mobile phones and the Internet. At the same time, in a more interconnected world emerging health threats—including infectious as well as noncommunicable diseases—require attention and resources.

Unfortunately, the world hasn’t fully applied lessons learned from initial efforts to make PHC universally available back in the 1970s. Global stewardship of increased investments in health has not been consistently well-managed, internationally and within countries. Weak governance and inadequate coordination between public and private sectors have led to inequitable access to people-centered, high-quality care. The health impact of conflict and war has exacerbated this inequity.

The global deficit of health workers, predicted to reach 18 million by 2030, greatly impedes the possibility of achieving universal access to PHC, as highlighted in Workforce 2030, the first global human resources for health strategy adopted by the World Health Assembly in May 2016. More than 400 million people worldwide lack access to essential health services provided by frontline health workers.
In the face of this, there has been a renewed call for primary health care reform to meet the Sustainable Development Goals and move toward universal health coverage. More effective and aligned policies, new models of care, and strategic public-private partnerships are needed to meet the PHC needs of all people.

The returns on investments in health are 9 to 1, as economic growth is accelerated when a population is healthier, and “one extra year of life expectancy has been shown to raise GDP per capita by about 4%.” Moreover, investment in the frontline health workforce is an investment in women’s empowerment, as women make up about 67% of employment in the health and social sectors.

PRACTICAL POLICIES AND PROGRAMS

IntraHealth supports countries in strengthening PHC through our areas of expertise, which are closely aligned to meet the needs of and contribute to measurement of indicators identified by the Primary Health Care Performance Initiative, launched in 2015 by the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation, World Bank Group, and World Health Organization. There is not a one-size-fits-all approach to primary health care. That’s why IntraHealth works in close collaboration with ministries of health and other partners and stakeholders, including community members, to provide assistance to develop the best model for each local context.

Health workers in frontline facilities, often nurses and midwives, and strong frontline teams, including community health workers, are essential to PHC. But all health workers, especially those on the front lines of care, need to have the skills and ability to offer essential live-saving services, both preventive and curative. And frontline health workers need to be effectively recruited, retained, and remunerated. They must be linked to the formal health system and supported by an enabling policy environment, well-trained supervisors, and well-resourced frontline facilities. Resources must come from a mix of public and private sources, both domestic and global, minimizing out-of-pocket payments, especially for the poorest.

To strengthen PHC, IntraHealth works in collaboration with countries and partners to support improved:

- **Leadership and governance:** building capacity at all levels for enhanced coordination and data-driven decision-making
- **Policy and advocacy:** ensuring a PHC-enabling policy environment and government accountability, supporting fiscal policies for domestic resource mobilization, and promoting government accountability
- **Community engagement:** developing context-specific models to promote community mobilization and advocacy and to facilitate self-care
- **Human resources management:** enhancing recruitment, retention, and performance of health workers at all levels
- **Education and performance:** supporting development of a fit-for-purpose workforce
- **Private sector approaches and partnerships:** engaging in innovative market-driven approaches complementary to public sector approaches and resources, and supporting private sector providers of primary health care
- **Digital health:** enabling policy-makers, health workers and the people they serve through technology and tools for ongoing education and decision-making
- **Measurement and analytics:** strengthening national data collection systems and measuring the impact of PHC strategies

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