

PRIMARY HEALTH CARE IN GHANA: BEFORE AND DURING THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC

COVID-19 PROMISING PRACTICES

The **Vital Signs Profile (VSP)** is a measurement tool to provide policymakers, donors, advocates and citizens with a sense of how the primary health care (PHC) system is functioning. VSPs provide an innovative snapshot of PHC systems at the national level, shining a light on where systems are strong and where there are opportunities for improvement. VSPs are structured around the most critical aspects of PHC, including financing, capacity, performance, and equity.

VSP EXPERIENCE

- Ghana formed a small technical working group with diverse health sector representation to support completion of the VSP assessment. Results were validated by a Steering Committee based at the Ghana Health Service Policy, Planning, and Monitoring Division and approved by the Minister of Health.
- The VSP process and results have catalyzed discussions on how to improve PHC performance in Ghana. The tool has focused attention on addressing priority gaps including: infrastructure, logistics, and supply systems; research, data, and information systems; and the health workforce.
- The VSP also helped identify improvement strategies, which informed the development of the new national PHC Strategic Implementation Plan (SIP). The SIP is being incorporated into Ghana's Roadmap for Universal Health Coverage, which will serve as the blueprint for the 2020-2030 plan towards achieving the Sustainable Development Goals.

PHC IN GHANA



Population: 31.1 million (2020)
GDP/Capita: \$2,202 USD (2019)
Human Development Index: 0.611
Life Expectancy at Birth: 63.8 Years (2018)

- The Ghana Ministry of Health (MOH) is responsible for public health policymaking, regulation, and resource management for the country.
- The Ghana Health Service (GHS) is responsible for the implementation of the country's PHC system.
- PHC is centered at the district level and is rooted in Ghana's Community-based Health Planning and Services (CHPS) program. CHPS serves Ghana's most vulnerable communities through community health workers and proactive population outreach.
- Ghana established its National Health Insurance Scheme (NHIS) in 2003, which covered 40% of Ghanaians for 95% of illnesses and diseases in 2014.

THE ROLE OF PHC IN GHANA'S COVID-19 RESPONSE



As of 7 April 2021

12 MAR 20

1ST CONFIRMED CASE

15 MAR 20

NATIONAL BAN ON PUBLIC GATHERINGS

1 Mar 21

FIRST DOSE OF COVID-19 VACCINE ADMINISTERED

91K

TOTAL CONFIRMED CASES

88.7K

RECOVERIES

752

DEATHS

Ghana has leveraged existing community health structures and a developing, multisectoral response network to rapidly respond to the COVID-19 crisis and ensure continued access to essential PHC services. COVID-19 has had a profound impact on PHC across all levels of Ghana's health system. Social distancing restrictions, safety concerns, and access barriers initially made it difficult to monitor and manage the care of high-risk patients. Nevertheless, many of Ghana's strengths--identified in its VSP including team-based, community-centered models of care--have enabled a rapid, locally-driven COVID-19 response. For instance, providers adapted new strategies to see patients within the community or used telehealth services to ensure continued access to care.

There has also been a notable increase in domestic resource mobilization for COVID-19, in part through partnerships with the private sector. The global pandemic has accelerated these partnerships via a push for a coordinated, multisectoral response. For example, at the peak of the pandemic, Ghana's military mobilized their resources to move supplies to health facilities and private companies came together to strengthen access to essential services, including building an infectious disease center and launching a drone delivery system in rural areas.

LEVERAGING PHC SYSTEM STRENGTHS AND IMPROVEMENT OPPORTUNITIES FOR COVID-19 RESPONSE AND RECOVERY

INSIGHTS FROM INTERVIEWS WITH DR. ANTHONY OFOSU AND DR. MOMODOU CHAM

Dr. Anthony Ofosu is the Deputy Director of the Ghana Health Service. He is also a public health physician with an interest in health care delivery for remote rural communities and harnessing information communication technology to advance care.

Dr. Momodou Cham is a public health physician working for the Christian Health Association of Ghana. He is also an active member of Ghana's Country Core Group for the Joint Learning Network for Universal Health Coverage.

Leveraging PHC System Strengths

As identified in Ghana's Vital Signs Profile

- **Community health workforce and community engagement and outreach mechanisms:** These structures helped the government to implement mass media campaigns for risk communication and outreach in a timely manner. They have helped to ensure communities know where and when to access vital information and services.
- **Information & surveillance systems:** A digitized, DHIS2-based Health Management Information System enabled regular tracking of indicators and institutional data for the COVID-19 response.

"It is not a nationally led response but a locally led response with national direction...with community structures. That's why our COVID-19 response was so robust because we already have a system for contact tracing... so right from the get-go, once a case is identified, we deploy community structures to do contact tracing."

- Dr. Anthony Ofosu

Adapting to Strengthen PHC System Gaps

As identified in Ghana's Vital Signs Profile

- **Facility-based resources:** In the context of COVID-19, clinical sites faced significant resource shortages, in part due to a lack of funds and a dependence on imports. Ghana has since shifted to local production of essential personal protective equipment and supplies through private partnerships and other domestic resource mobilization efforts.
- **Empanelment:** Ghana's selective model of empanelment proved effective for supporting populations with chronic conditions or those who traditionally sought care regularly prior to the pandemic. However, populations outside of these groups were at high risk of being overlooked and unable to access care.

"In responding to future pandemics, Ghana will benefit greatly from an extensive community-based empanelment model. This model will have the current Community-based Health Planning and Services (CHPS) system as its foundation. The model will help with needs assessment, vulnerability analysis and community-based care for patients who will not be able to visit the hospitals due to the pandemic"

- Dr. Momodou Cham

PHC in Ghana Beyond COVID-19

Ghana has long been seen as a leader in health systems performance in sub-Saharan Africa and is again setting an example and drawing attention to the critical role of community engagement and participation in ensuring the resilience of PHC systems in the time of COVID-19 and beyond. The pandemic has highlighted areas for further improvement - local production of resources, private sector engagement, and need for comprehensive empanelment - which may serve as an accelerant for change. However, further funding and continued political will are critical to creating lasting, sustainable improvements.

Dr. Ofosu and Dr. Cham recognize PHC as the bedrock of Ghana's health service delivery. Producing the VSP and utilizing results to inform Ghana's PHC Strategic Implementation Plan have helped determine priorities for the country's Roadmap for Universal Health Coverage. Ghana's Roadmap will serve as the blueprint for the next decade as Ghana recovers from the pandemic and seeks to achieve high-quality universal health coverage by 2030. To further explore Ghana's Vital Signs Profile, visit [ImprovingPHC.org](https://www.improvingphc.org).