

Primary Health Care – Technical Definition

Primary Health Care refers to core functions of a nation's health system. Encompassing front-line health service delivery (primary care) as well as health system structure; governance and financing; the intersectoral policy environment; and social determinants of health, primary health care provides essential health interventions according to a community's needs and expectations. Effective primary health care requires the institutionalized participation of civil society and the community in policy dialogues and accountability mechanisms to ensure that the health system is socially acceptable, universally accessible and affordable, and scientifically sound.

Primary care describes the provision of essential health care services. Primary care serves as the main entry point into the health care system for the majority of health problems, provides proactive delivery of key preventive services to populations, and manages chronic conditions over time. Primary care is provided by a suitably trained and motivated workforce (often in teams) supported by integrated referral and information systems. When appropriately resourced and planned, primary care provides a more effective, cost-effective, and equitable alternative to health systems that overly emphasize specialty care and individual disease control. **Primary care** is continuous, building a participatory relationship between a provider and patient (and care-givers) to foster mutual understanding and self-reliance. Primary care is people-focused and comprehensive, addressing the health needs of all members of society across the life-course incorporating promotion, prevention, early-detection, treatment, rehabilitation, and palliation. Primary care represents the principal element of a continuing health care process that may include integrating and coordinating secondary and tertiary levels of care.