Advocacy Guide: Linking Primary Health Care to Global Health Challenges and Goals

Introduction

While the world has seen tremendous improvements in health and human progress since the turn of the millennium, continued progress requires a new approach. The number of people living with chronic illnesses like diabetes, heart diseases and cancer is on the rise, even as many countries still struggle to control infectious diseases like HIV, tuberculosis and malaria. Addressing today's global health challenges requires building strong and resilient health systems, especially at the primary health care level, that can address people's diverse health needs at every stage of life.

Primary health care is a person's first and main point of contact with the health system. When strong, primary health care addresses the vast majority of people's health needs, from preventing and treating illness, to managing chronic health conditions, to delivering essential health services like vaccinations and reproductive, maternal, newborn and child health care. Strong primary health care is the foundation of an effective, efficient and equitable health system, and a cornerstone of sustainable development.

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PRIMARY HEALTH CARE
PERFORMANCE INITIATIVE

How strong primary health care drives progress on critical global health challenges:

Infectious Diseases

- **Tuberculosis (TB)** is the world's deadliest infectious disease, claiming 1.6 million lives in 2017 alone.[1] An estimated 3.6 million people living with the disease don't know they have it, meaning they can't get the treatment they need and are at higher risk of infecting others.[2] Strong primary health care can diagnose and treat TB early, saving lives and curbing the spread of the disease.

- **Multidrug resistant TB (MDR-TB)** is also on the rise globally. Drug resistance can emerge when patients do not complete a full course of treatment or when drugs are of poor quality.[1] When primary health care is strong, people can receive a complete course of quality TB treatment in their communities, reducing the risk of spreading drug resistance.

- In 2017, there were 36.9 million people living with **HIV**, only 75% of who knew their status.[3] Primary health care facilities and trusted providers can help people get tested and treated for HIV in their community.

- More than one million people around the world are **co-infected with both HIV and TB**.[4] Yet in many countries, a lack of integrated TB and HIV services means that patients who need treatment for both diseases have to travel long distances to separate clinics.[5] When primary health care is strong, TB and HIV services are offered in the same place – making it easier for people to get the care they need.

- 300,000 children die from **malaria** each year – that's one child every two minutes.[5] Strong primary health care systems are the best platform to diagnose malaria, deliver preventive services like bed nets, offer antimalarial medicines, and care for people who are sick.[6] One study found that strong primary health care can reduce the burden of malaria by as much as 66 percent.[6]

Noncommunicable Diseases (NCDs)

NCDs like cardiovascular disease, cancer, chronic respiratory disease and diabetes are on the rise globally, claiming 41 million lives each year.[7] People living with NCDs may show no symptoms until it is too late, making it especially important to screen people early and frequently.[8] Primary health care provides a platform to screen people for NCDs, offer guidance on preventing NCDs, deliver targeted interventions to at-risk groups, and offer long-term care for chronic conditions when needed. Primary health care also provides an efficient way to treat NCDs; it is capable of managing people's multiple health conditions in the same place and at the same time.

Sexual and Reproductive Health

A recent *Lancet* report found that almost all of the 4.3 billion people of reproductive age worldwide will have inadequate access to sexual and reproductive health services over the course of their lives.[9] Even in communities where these services are available, fear of stigma and discrimination often discourage people from seeking care at specialized clinics. Strong primary health care provides a 'safe space' where women and other people can seek sexual and reproductive health services alongside other types of health care.

Maternal and Newborn Health

The world has made tremendous progress in improving the health of women and children in the past twenty years, but too many mothers and newborns still aren't getting the health care they need to survive and thrive. Newborn mortality now accounts for 46% of all childhood deaths and 75% of maternal deaths are caused by preventable and treatable complications.[10, 11] Strong primary health care can help curb these deaths by delivering the continuous, quality care that mothers and newborns need, especially around childbirth. Evidence shows that when strong, primary health care can reduce up to 77% of maternal, child, and newborn deaths and stillbirths.[12]

Universal Health Coverage

Universal health coverage means that people can get the quality health services they need without experiencing financial hardship. It's a long way off from the reality, with half the world's people still lacking access to essential health services. Primary health care can deliver the majority of these services and meet more than 80 percent of people's diverse health needs, making it one of the most effective and cost-effective steps to universal health coverage.

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Global HIV & AIDS statistics - 2018 fact sheet [Internet]. UNAIDS. [cited 2018 Oct 10]. Available from: http://www.unaids.org/en/resources/fact-sheet

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6 Ten things you didn't know about malaria [Internet]. UNICEF. 2018 [cited 2018 Oct 10]. Available from: https://www.unicef.org/press-releases/ten-things-you-didnt-know-about-malaria

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