

Conclusions and key considerations

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Country Health Systems & Services Profiles are comprehensive reviews of African countries' health systems and services. Each profile provides an in-depth examination of the organization, financing and delivery of a country's health services. It also looks at health care reforms, assesses health system performance and highlights the challenges that face a health system in Africa. Using the latest data from national, regional and international sources, as well as existing reports and literature, the profiles support policy-makers and analysts working on the development of health systems.

The African Health Observatory Platform on Health Systems and Policies (AHOP) is a regional partnership that promotes evidence-informed policy-making. AHOP is hosted by the World Health Organization Regional Office for Africa (WHO AFRO) through the integrated African Health Observatory (IAHO) and is a network of centres of excellence from across the region, leveraging existing national and regional collaborations.

Nigeria has consistently tried to reform its health system over the last 60 years, but significant functionality issues remain. Given the baseline context of a large and growing population, high triple disease burden (communicable diseases, noncommunicable diseases, and injuries and violence), low life expectancy (compared with the regional average) and consistently inadequate spending on health, most reforms have remained aspirational. In the last 25 years, a fairly stable democracy has strengthened global and national interests, increasing capacity to translate these aspirations into actions. However, the federal structure of government, with which health system governance is aligned, is plagued by insufficient collaboration and overlapping responsibilities, leading to inefficient use of limited resources.

Available evidence highlights inherent weaknesses across the World Health Organization health system building blocks and the two additional building blocks – community participation and partnerships and research – recognized by the Nigerian Government (Chapters 1–8).

Mandatory health insurance is being implemented progressively but not rapidly enough, and Nigeria is still far behind its regional and global peers in achieving its health insurance targets. Out-of-pocket expenditure remains high, exposing the predominantly low-income population to catastrophic health expenditure in the absence of an established and sustainable financial risk protection mechanism.

The COVID-19 pandemic tested the resilience of the already weak health system, which coped by crowding out essential health services with attendant consequences. Although Nigeria scores highly in detecting external shocks, especially communicable disease outbreaks, inherent health system resilience remains poor, and preparedness and response capacity are weak. Capacity developed during the regional Ebola epidemic and built on during the COVID-19 pandemic has not been sustained; more effective government collaboration and commitment is needed to reignite, expand and sustain efforts.

While health system performance outputs – access to, demand for and quality of services – have improved over the last decade, they are still insufficient for attaining universal health coverage (UHC). Poor health system performance is attributable to poor policy implementation (Chapter 9).

Inadequate health budgets, poor utilization of allocated funds and corruption diminish allocative efficiency. Weak governance, poor accountability and health sector corruption affect all health system functions and inhibit technical efficiency.

Core health system outcomes – coverage of health services, health security, patient satisfaction and financial risk protection – are all suboptimal (Chapter 10). Performance outputs and system outcomes show wide regional variation that needs further consideration in future legislation.

International agencies and the private sector continue to play important roles in supporting resource generation, capacity-building and some health reforms, but they require stronger coordination and regulation.

Successfully implementing existing reforms is now essential to achieving UHC and making progress towards the health-related Sustainable Development Goals. Implementation will facilitate efforts to increase investment in the health sector, bolster health care infrastructure, improve the quality of care, reinforce regulatory frameworks and ensure fair and equal access to health care services throughout the country.