

COVID-19: Health Services Learning Hub

Need

There is an urgent demand from Member States for technical support in maintaining health services during the COVID-19 pandemic response. In particular, there is a critical need to share and learn from innovative country practices that can inform the collective global response to COVID-19 in real time. At present, sharing of knowledge is often fragmented, ad hoc, and lacks a formal mechanism to collate, synthesise and operationalise such practices. Given the unprecedented challenge of the COVID-19 pandemic, stakeholders need a responsive and innovative learning architecture that will facilitate the harvesting of such knowledge for meaningful action.

Goal: Drive activated learning to maintain essential health services in context of COVID-19 pandemic - and transform health services for the future.

Response

WHO is developing the COVID19: Health Services Learning Hub (HLH), a dynamic and responsive, state-of-the-art learning architecture that will support Member States in maintaining essential health services during the COVID-19 pandemic and beyond, including the recovery and post-pandemic phase.

The COVID19: Health Services Learning Hub will support implementation of WHO's Operational guidance for maintaining essential health services (EHS) during an outbreak¹, which provides a set of targeted actions that countries should consider at national, regional, and local levels to reorganize and maintain access to essential quality health services for all. The HLH will use key areas of this EHS Operational guidance as an entry point for learning:

- Adjust governance and coordination mechanisms to support timely action
- Prioritize essential health services and adapt to changing contexts and needs
- Optimize service delivery settings and platforms
- Establish safe and effective patient flow at all levels
- Rapidly optimize health workforce capacity
- Maintain the availability of essential medications, equipment and supplies
- Fund public health and remove financial barriers to access
- Strengthen communication strategies to support the appropriate use of essential services
- Strengthen the monitoring of essential health services
- Use digital platforms to support essential health service delivery

The immediate focus of the HLH will thus be on the maintenance of essential health services during the outbreak. The HLH will also focus on health service recovery in the post-acute phase of the pandemic and health services strengthening in the post-pandemic phase. The HLH will require close connectivity with the research agenda on COVID-19 being overseen by the WHO Science Division. However, this learning endeavour on essential health services is not focused on formal research. In addition, the learning activities do not cover issues related to clinical management of COVID-19 or other health conditions, which is overseen by the IMST pillar on clinical case management.

¹ Maintaining essential health services: operational guidance for the COVID-19 context.

<https://www.who.int/publications-detail/covid-19-operational-guidance-for-maintaining-essential-health-services-during-an-outbreak>

Audience

The target audiences for the HLH include national COVID-19 incident management teams, service planners at national, subnational and facility levels, service providers, as well as WHO and technical partners supporting delivery of essential health services. The HLH will be grounded in the challenges faced by these actors, with the aim to facilitate rapid knowledge sharing and real-time problem solving in the context of current health service challenges.

Key Themes

Action-focused and responsive

- All work will have an intentional focus on immediate utility in taking action to maintain essential health services.
- The work will have zero tolerance for adding any additional burden to already over-stretched health services and systems actors.
- User feedback will be solicited and used to check utility of learning that is generated and refine the learning topics and architecture accordingly.

User-led development

- WHO will work with key stakeholders from the outset to understand their priorities in the context of health services and COVID-19.
- Topics for learning labs, briefs and other materials will be co-developed between WHO and Member State representatives. Particular emphasis will be given to countries receiving intensified health service support from WHO, where lessons will be catalogued and representatives will be invited to lead discussions in communities of practice.

Innovative

- The unprecedented challenge of the COVID-19 pandemic requires new, innovative ways of working.
- WHO will build a new digital platform that will blend different modalities to combine informal discussions with high level policy analysis.
- This will create a 'safe space' environment for discussion, innovation and experimentation of emerging strategies for maintaining and strengthening essential health services.

Collaborative

- WHO will bring together country stakeholders, WHO experts, and other partners (the 'Network of Networks') to promote shared learning in a spirit of solidarity and co-development.
- Within WHO, the HLH will include staff from headquarters, regional offices and country offices as well as cross-programmatic and cross-departmental working.

Architecture

- **Learning labs** – At its core, the HLH will comprise of dynamic communities of practice that will focus on sharing approaches and common strategies to health service challenges in the context of COVID-19. Facilitated learning labs on key thematic areas (i.e. digital innovation) will aid such discussions and help to challenge each other and spark innovation between countries.
- **Country Action Briefs** – These will capture innovative examples of action being taken by countries, including challenges and outcomes in responding to COVID-19 in the health services context. These country action briefs will be used as a catalyst to generate discussion between participants in the learning laboratories and contribute to the development of learning briefs. For example, information on a country digital innovation to maintain essential health services could be incorporated into an action brief. This could then be synthesised into a broader learning brief for all participants,
- **Learning Briefs** – WHO will synthesise key themes from the case studies and learning labs to demonstrate early lessons on emergent strategies to support health services in the context of the COVID19 pandemic. Additional topics will be selected based upon problems presented in different parts of the learning architecture.
- **Knowledge Hub** – A dedicated, curated hub will bring together documents, guidelines, webinars, and events from WHO, other UN agencies, Collaborating centres and Non-State Actors in official relations with WHO. This will be a ‘one stop shop’ for countries to access reliable, timely information related to health services and COVID-19.
- **WHO EHS Help Desk** – Close connectivity with the Pillar 9 EHS Help Desk will allow key questions related to maintaining essential health services to be channelled for iterative and active learning within the HLH.

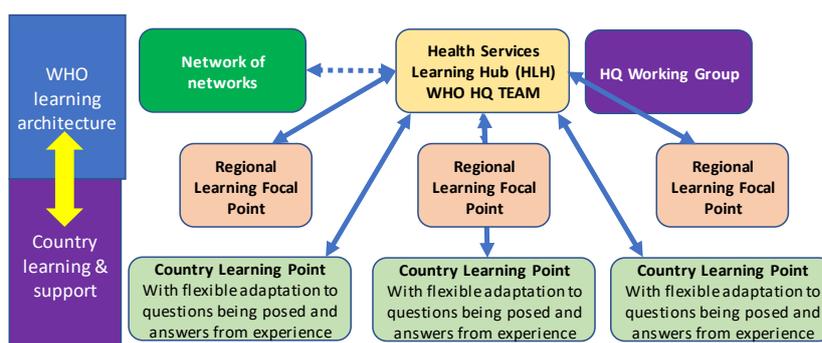
How will the HLH add value?

- The HLH has a **clearly defined focus to support countries in maintaining essential health services** during the outbreak, building towards early recovery and sustained transformation in the post-pandemic phase.
- Experiences and knowledge from ongoing country efforts and promising innovations **will be rapidly described, synthesized, curated and disseminated** across various settings and stakeholders.
- The HLH will drive innovation across countries in a new, agile approach that is urgently needed in the COVID-19 context by **utilising real-time collection of lessons from frontline health services using innovative digital strategies.**
- The HLH will form a **‘Network of Networks’** that will draw upon and amplify a wide range of learning initiatives undertaken by international organisations and technical partners.

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How will it operate?

- Country learning points would be nominated and self-identified based on interest and need through WHO networks and an open-source approach.
- The team would ensure that any learning briefs that are developed are directly informed by country experience and blended with WHO technical expertise.
- The core team would maintain close connectivity with a network of networks as well as WHO departments.
- Close connectivity with regional and country offices is maintained based on the questions emerging from the national level.
- Existing regional and country focal points for health services work closely with the virtual team, providing strategic guidance and jointly planning learning.



Illustrative example

- A “country learning point” has an interesting experience to share and is also looking to generate further solutions in a specific related to maintaining essential health services (for example a digital innovation).
- Experience is captured rapidly through an action brief (supported by WHO or the network of networks). If the area requires deeper exploration a learning laboratory is established to facilitate solution generation.
- In parallel, a call is made through the ‘Network of Networks’ to source any emerging learning on the subject. Emerging findings are then utilized to draft “learning briefs” that can be utilized for action in other contexts.
- Emerging learning is placed within the HLH knowledge hub so that it can be accessed swiftly by others across the world.

Timeline

