



Strengthening Healthcare Systems in the GCC Countries is Key to Improved Fairness and Accountability

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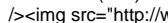
Addressing challenges and identifying solutions in the health systems in the GCC countries is the focus of a five-day workshop sponsored by the World Bank in association with the International Monetary Fund (IMF)- Middle East Center for Economics and Finance (CEF). The workshop, Health Systems Challenges and Solutions in Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) Countries, brings together 32 representatives from Ministries of Health, Finance, and Planning and health agencies like the Supreme Council of Health Services, as well as hospitals and health insurance companies. Presentations will be delivered by experts from the World Bank, Harvard University, and the OECD and will aim to familiarize policy makers in the GCC countries with the World Bank's latest regional strategy on health in the Arab world. The trainers will focus on key challenges in the health systems and the necessary solutions drawing on global best practices. This session is part of a series of human development related courses held in partnership between the World Bank and the IMF Center.

The GCC countries have made important strides in improving the health standards of their populations but the government spending on health care remains low and does not meet people's expectations, said Bassam Ramadan, World Bank Country Manager in Kuwait. "The GCC governments spend an average of 7 percent of their annual budgets on healthcare compared to the 17 percent spent by OECD countries." The World Bank's regional health sector strategy, Fairness and Accountability: Engaging in Health Systems in the Middle East and North Africa (MENA), highlights that building fair and accountable systems is key to improving quality and access of health care. This is at a time when GCC is witnessing a rise in death and disability due to non-communicable diseases (NCDs) and injuries. Four GCC countries are in the global top 20 for obesity: Bahrain, Kuwait, Saudi Arabia and United Arab Emirates. As a result, diseases like diabetes affect almost one in five people in the GCC which is almost three times the average of other high income countries. Road traffic injuries take a disproportionate toll on the youth of the region, even though public health measures like enforcement of seatbelt use and speed limits has been found to be successful in saving lives world over.

"The proper response to the challenge of containing the rising burden of non-communicable diseases and injuries requires more than only increasing health spending, said Enis Baris, World Bank Sector Manager for Health in the MENA region and co-author of the Strategy. "Our strategy calls for revisiting the values and principles that underpin health systems for more pluralistic and accountable health system governance. In the GCC countries this would mean rethinking the way healthcare is financed and organized to align incentives for improved access to, and continuity of, appropriate care in primary care settings. It also means reaching out to other sectors to set up the regulatory framework for tobacco control, or prevention of road injuries." The World Bank is well positioned to work with GCC countries on transformative health sector reforms mobilizing data, information, experiences and interventions stemming from its five decades of experience in the health sector in over 150 countries from around the world to create systems and institutions that are more fair and accountable to the people.

"By re-orienting health systems in the Arab world from systems only treating sickness to systems also preserving and promoting health, people can live longer and healthier lives at a lower cost to the state and the people themselves, said Aaka H. Pande, World Bank Health Economist and Strategy co-author who helped organize the workshop.

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