REPUBLIC OF LEBANON
MINISTRY OF PUBLIC HEALTH

World Health Organization
Lebanon

Executive Summary

Lebanon National Health Strategy: Vision 2030

Delegation of the European Union
to Lebanon

Introduction

Lebanon is passing through one of the most severe and complex crises in its recent history, caused by the interplay of political turbulence, socioeconomic meltdown, and the lingering COVID-19 pandemic. Regionally, conflict and instability continue to result in the influx of refugees, which constitute now around one third of the Lebanese population.

The intertwined crises Lebanon has been suffering from unmasked the effects of pre-existing health system inefficiencies, including the predominance of tertiary care over preventive and primary care; a weakened public health sector; a pluralistic financing system; and a supply-induced demand with unsustainable and unrealistic expectations. The synergistic effects of these crises amplified the malfunctioning of a disrupted health system, rendering a system notorious for its resilience at the verge of a breakdown. As a result, the ability to respond to the increased needs of a growing population was deterred. Equitable access to care was exceptionally difficult for people with vulnerabilities. Worsening in health outcomes was noted at many fronts: life expectancy, maternal mortality, under 5 mortality, and childhood vaccination. Previously forgotten diseases such as diphtheria, tetanus, and most recently cholera re-emerged, and the health gains of previous years have started to fade away.

The multifaceted crisis has also severely impacted access to and utilization of healthcare services. The percentage of households with difficulty accessing health care rose from 25% to 36% within around 4 months during the year 2020. Hospitalizations, particularly for surgeries, diminished by 30% in 2021, and the average monthly hospitalization days decreased by 25%. The cost of treatments, medical consultations, or transportation to health facilities have become prohibitive to many, resulting in delayed presentation of patients for medical attention, who at many times presented with decompensated or non-salvageable conditions. Duly, challenged access to specialized healthcare was coupled with an exponential increased demand on the services provided by the Primary Health Care Network. With crisis, an opportunity has emerged for repositioning primary health care as a gateway for affordable, quality promotive, preventive, and primary health services, and for moving closer towards achieving Universal Health Coverage.

The recent drain of human resources particularly those with high competencies and specialization has become an increasing concern, with more than 20% of nurses and around 40% of doctors having already left the country. Additionally, the layoffs, salary cuts and closures of pharmacies and the reduced activities of hospitals which accompanied the economic crisis, deleteriously affected the healthcare workforce. This shortage in qualified human resources endangered the quality and availability of health care services.

The pharmaceutical sector was also hit hard by the crisis. In 2020, the government's policy of relying on external sources for medications and medical supplies, coupled the economic crisis, led to drops in imports, resulting in severe market shortages. This has paved the way to hoarding, smuggling, black market practices, and the entry of illegal, low-quality drugs and supplies into the country.

A massive mismatch between health needs of the population and the available resources has emerged. Focusing on health financing, the overall Ministry of Public Health budget was around $485.9 million in 2018 compared to less than $37 million in 2022. Despite that, Lebanon remains committed to achieving universal health coverage by 2030 and renews its commitment to health promotion, equitable access to quality health services, and financial protection.

As times of mounting hurdles and limited resources, a strategy to set direction, highlight priorities, bypass shortcomings, and build on the existing strengths becomes more imperative than ever. Under the leadership of the Ministry of Public Health, this strategy will help restructure the health system to become more equitable, integrated, and efficient, ensuring universal access to value-based and people-centered quality care. Enhanced investment in health is expected to contribute to human development and economic growth, and thus is expected to have gains beyond health.

National Health Strategy: Vision 2030

Objectives and Expected Outcomes of the Lebanon National Health Strategy

The strategy will aim to:

- Sustain strategic networks and partnerships between sector stakeholders around shared agendas serving the public interest
- Identify priority strategic interventions and mobilize the required resources for a paradigm shift in the governance and organization of the service delivery
- Build the capacity of the whole sector for anticipating upcoming challenges and for designing and implementing effective, efficient, and equitable responses to the legitimate expectations of communities, families, and individuals
- Respond to acute crisis to sustain the continuum of health services and work on the developmental agenda
- Promote the health sector as a productive one that, in addition to giving rise to healthy and productive individuals, creates job opportunities and generates business

A Framework for Action: Immediate Relief and Recovery

An immediate response to the current situation is required to prevent the collapse of the health sector. Health institutions and communities have clear, concrete, and pressing needs to survive the current compounded crisis. It remains of prime importance to articulate the required urgent actions, to ensure their sustainability and contribute to achieve the expected short-, medium- and long-term outcomes. Proper financing of the sector may be secured from multiple sources and agencies, including from international donations and soft loan support as a transition bridge to move from the ongoing humanitarian and emergency support to sustainable financing.

(a) The Health Crisis Response and Recovery Fund

Serving this purpose, a Health Crisis Response and Recovery Fund earmarked for health may be created and managed by a sector-wide inclusive structure to ensure a transparent and accountable process that respects good governance principles.

(b) The National Health Crisis Response and Recovery Council

The Government will set the needed structure in creating a National Health Crisis Response and Recovery Council, which may bring together, under the Ministry of Public Health leadership, the major stakeholders and agencies that are active players – as funders or implementers – in the health sector. The Council will serve as a forum for broadening policy dialogue to develop coherent sector policies and an oversight on the health crisis response and recovery fund.

National Health Strategic Directions

The Lebanese Ministry of Public Health developed, with the support of the World Health Organization, the Lebanon health sector strategic 2030 vision, which lays out five areas for strategic investment in the recovery of the health sector. In each area, stakeholders of the health sector must join forces to respond to the health effects of the crisis and rebuild a sustainable and resilient health system. Jointly, they can respond to the escalating unmet health needs, while participating in defining the direction of recovery and reform.

These strategic directions are:

SD. 1	**Strengthened health sector governance, and capacitated Ministry of Public Health to regulate and ensure essential public health functions**
SG. 1.1	Institutionalize and sustain collaborative governance
SG. 1.2	Enable effective Ministry leadership, intersectoral coordination and community engagement
SG. 1.3	Enhance decentralization and autonomy
SG. 1.4	Ensure health security and other essential public health functions
SG. 1.5	Establish the practice of good governance principles
SD. 2	**Harmonized financing system and redesigned benefits packages for universal health coverage, ensuring to all people equitable access to essential health services without enduring financial hardship**
SG. 2.1	Ensure sufficient financing and design a unified basic benefits package for all public funds
SG. 2.2	Develop tools to identify the poor and vulnerable population and adopt mechanisms to better target them
SG. 2.3	Formally involve private insurance funds, including mutuality funds, through regulated and standardized complementary coverage, with a focus on the informal sector of the economy
SG. 2.4	Revisit and harmonize institutional arrangements and public-private partnerships, with standardized mechanisms across public funds
SG. 2.5	Reset payment mechanisms of the Ministry and public funds to get better value for money in the procurement of goods and services and standardize medical and financial audits
SG. 2.6	A road map to achieve the long-term objective of unifying public health funds under one autonomous health authority
SD. 3	**Transformed health services delivery system from supply-driven into people-centered and integrated health care within the framework of universal health coverage**
SG. 3.1	Scale up the national primary health care network, define catchment areas for primary health care centers as gatekeepers, and set up a referral system privileging the front-line public hospitals.
SG. 3.2	Redefine the model of secondary and tertiary care with a focus on front-line public hospitals
SG. 3.3	Redesign the coverage and provision of emergency health care services
SG. 3.4	Transform long-term care towards a professional practice that is respectful of human rights, and strengthen palliative care
SG. 3.5	Involve the private sector beyond provision of hospital care
SD. 4	**Health promotion and disease prevention**
SG. 4.1	Seek intersectoral approach to address social determinants of health inequity and promote the Health in All Policies concept
SG. 4.2	Use communication and social mobilization for health
SG. 4.3	Target the youth and promote the school health program
SG. 4.4	Design and implement programs targeting Non-communicable Diseases that are integrated at different levels of health care
SG. 4.5	Fight communicable diseases
SG. 4.6	Implement the National Nutrition Strategy
SD. 5	**Enhanced resilience and adaptability of the health system by strengthening its building blocks**
SG. 5.1	Health workforce development, retention, and repurposing
SG. 5.2	National health information system
SG. 5.3	Medical products and technologies

Investment in Integrated Recovery Packages

Four areas are identified for strategic investment in health sector recovery. An additional fifth cross-cutting area on digitalization is considered. An integrated package of actions is proposed for each area within a transparent and accountable framework.

Strategic investment area 1: Expanding universal health coverage

Universal health coverage needs to be expanded to ensure access for all to timely, quality, people-centered care, with the necessary arrangements to avoid exposing users to financial hardship.

Transformative lines of action for expanding universal health coverage includes:

- Redefine a health benefits package that makes equitable access realistic
- Redesign service provision to allow for better quality and more satisfactory patient experiences
- Invest in human resources
- Capitalize on and expand achievements made in ensuring affordable access to pharmaceuticals and technology
- Secure the needed funding from mixed sources

Strategic investment area 2: Healthier living

Focus on health promotion and disease prevention through:

- Intervene at the policy, prevention, screening, and management levels to reduce high-impact health risks
- Monitor and promote population health
- Engage and better remunerate community health workers in prevention, monitoring and other public health initiatives

Strategic investment area 3: Emergency health preparedness response and recovery

Health security intends to pre-empt health emergencies and improve the country's readiness to face catastrophic health incidents and pandemics. Within the all-hazards approach, and in line with international health regulations, the Ministry of Public Health and other sector stakeholders are to develop programs and initiatives to:

- Ensure emergency preparedness and response capacity by developing high-quality, regularly stress-tested, and updated preparedness plans and structures with clear lines of command and control, and risk communication led by the Ministry
- Enhance Ministry coordination capacity, which includes establishing an emergency operation unit or team at the Ministry to coordinate health emergencies preparedness and response, develop plans for capacity-building and enhance multisectoral partnership
- Re-establish critical public health functions, including the central public health lab, antimicrobial surveillance, and a national infection prevention and control program
- Fighting communicable diseases by following the One Health approach, which is a main component in health security.

Strategic investment area 4: Health governance for the public interest

Health governance for the public interest is intended to re-establish trust in health authorities and align governmental and non-governmental resources with national goals and the public interest. Programs and initiatives shall be developed to:

- Operationalize the One Health and Health in All Policies concepts
- Make regulations and govern sector based on facts and evidence by agreeing on a shared agenda to:
  - Expand universal health coverage through the work of the health benefits package task force
  - Identify the poor and vulnerable
  - Design a national health information system master plan
  - Develop a roadmap to unify all public funds under one autonomous authority with well-defined governance structure
  - Institutionalize and sustain collaborative sector governance
  - Build and modernize the Ministry organigram

Strategic investment area 5: Digitalization

Investing in a health information system is essential for the proper implementation of all four strategic investment areas. Digitalization will provide evidence for decision-making, help avoid duplications in coverage and utilization of services, serve to identify vulnerable populations, include indicators, monitor patient safety, and most of all, ensure transparency and accountability.