

What are the Health System Building Blocks?

GAVI CSO
Project Fact
Sheet No.5

December 1,
2013

Definition: Health System

A system is an arrangement of parts and their interconnections that come together for a **purpose**. A health system consists of all organizations, people and actions whose primary intent is to promote, restore or maintain health. Like any other system, it is a set of **inter-connected parts** that have to function together to be effective.

A health system is composed of many parts. In particular:

- Patients
- Families
- Communities
- Ministries of Health
- Health providers
- Health financing bodies

Each component has interconnecting roles and functions. This is why **systems thinking** is critical – if you look at one component in isolation, you will miss the many ways that that component interacts with the other components.

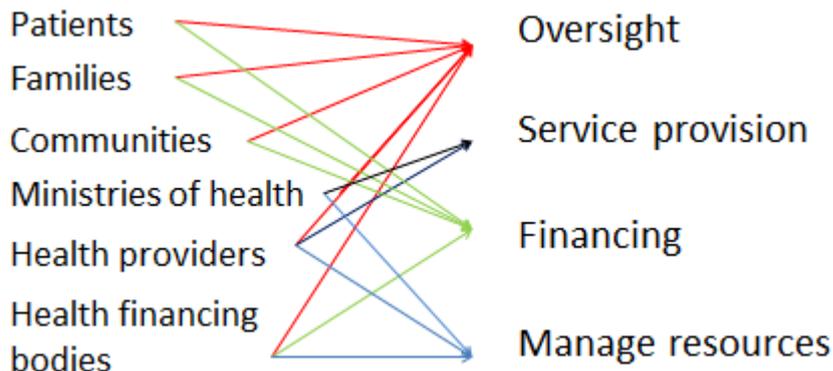


Figure 1: The interconnecting roles and functions (right side) of the components of a health system (left side)

The Six Health System Building Blocks

The World Health Organization recommends supporting and strengthening a health system based on the below framework (Figure 2). When you strengthen a health system, you improve the six health system building blocks and **manage their interactions** in ways that achieve more **equitable** and **sustained** improvements across health services and health outcomes. **PEOPLE** are often listed as the seventh building block. “People” refers to individuals, households, and communities as civil society, consumers, patients, payers, and producers of health through knowledge, attitudes, behaviors, and practices.

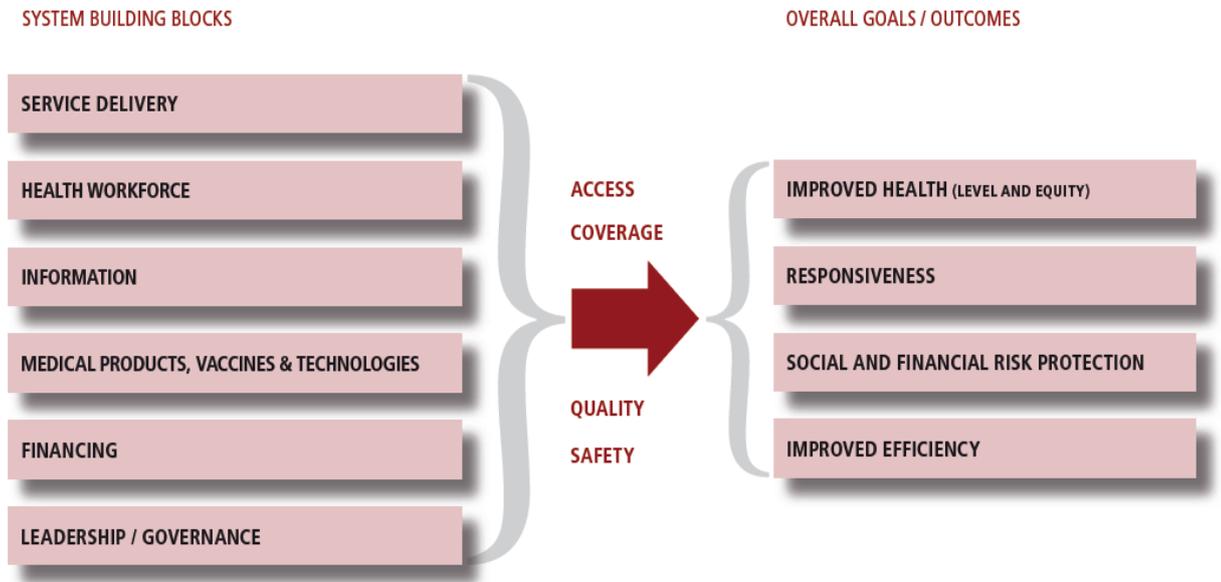


Figure 2: The WHO's Health System Framework (Source: World Health Organization. *Everybody's Business: Strengthening health systems to improve health outcomes—WHO's Framework for Action*. Geneva: WHO, 2007, page 3.)

Strengthening a health system takes a long time. Efforts must be tailored to a specific country. Donors must be coordinated. Everyone involved must be committed to a long-term process. Here is a basic checklist for what to think about when you analyze the building blocks and plan to strengthen them in your own country:

- Service Delivery.** Good service delivery comprises *quality, access, safety and coverage*.
- Health Workforce.** A well-performing workforce consists of *human resources* management, skills and policies.
- Health Information System.** A well performing system ensures the production, analysis, dissemination and use of *timely* and *reliable* information.
- Medical Products.** Procurement and supply programs need to ensure *equitable access, assured quality* and *cost-effective use*.
- Financing.** A good health financing system raises *adequate funds* for health, *protects people* from financial catastrophe, allocates resources, and purchases good and services in ways that *improve quality, equity, and efficiency*.
- Leadership and Governance.** Effective leadership and governance ensures the existence of *strategic policy frameworks*, effective *oversight* and coalition-building, provision of appropriate *incentives*, and attention to *system design*, and *accountability*.

For more information

- [The WHO Health Systems Framework](#)
- [WHO: Health Systems Topics](#)