

PRIMARY HEALTH CARE IN IRAQ

Primary health care as a strategy has been adopted in Iraq since Al-Ma-Ata declaration in 1978. To meet the basic needs of the population and to fulfill the requirements for primary health care, an extensive network of health care institutions was established.

Primary health care service delivery system

The Ministry of Health (MoH) is the main provider of health care in Iraq. There is a Directorate of Health (DoH) in each governorate (two in Baghdad). Governorates are further divided for administrative purposes into 118 health districts. Each district covers on average of between 200 000 - 300 000 people.

Primary health care is provided through PHC centers. Patients are charged nominal fees for curative care and medicines. Primary health care services including immunization, antenatal care, health education, etc. are provided free of charge.

There are 3600 PHC centers and sub-centers throughout the country. Approximately 50.4% of the PHC centers are staffed by at least one medical doctor and are referred to as PHC main centers. The remaining 49.6% are staffed by trained health workers (nurses and medical assistants) and are referred to as PHC sub-centers. In each district there is on average of 5 to 10 PHC centers serving a population ranging from 10 000 –45 000. There is currently on average 0.7 PHC centers per 10 000 population. This is low in comparison to both international standards and neighboring countries (two to three per 10 000).

Components of the services provided:

1. Maternal and Newborn Health

Services for women are provided in an integrated and comprehensive manner covering preventive, promotive and curative aspects of care. The focus is on:

Premarital care, antenatal care, delivery care, postnatal care, family planning, and care for the newborn.

2. Child health and immunization

Services include promotive, preventative and curative services, such as: growth monitoring, Expanded Programme on Immunization (EPI), and Integrated Management of Childhood Illnesses (IMCI).

3. Communicable diseases treatment and control

This component deals with the management of communicable diseases with the emphasis on prevention, early diagnosis and initiation of measures to prevent transmission and serious morbidity. Disease surveillance and reporting are an integral part of the activities.

4. Nutrition

Improvement of nutrition status is provided through interventions and is aimed at specific target groups, in particular women and children.

Services include:

promotion of proper nutrition, prevention of malnutrition, and treatment of malnutrition.

5. Immunization

Immunization is an essential service and is based on an uninterrupted and monitored cold chain of constantly available vaccines. Services aim to use every opportunity to ensure wider coverage through:

routine immunization services, National Immunization Days (NIDs), and special mass campaigns during outbreaks.

6. Non-communicable diseases treatment and prevention

Non-communicable disease treatment and prevention are currently being piloted at the PHC level. Services are aimed at promoting healthy lifestyle, risk assessment, recognizing, assessing and initiating treatment and referral of emergency situations.

7. Oral health

Basic oral health care services at PHC level consist of preventive oral health services (oral health education) and basic treatment services including the emergency relief of pain and sepsis (including dental extractions).

8. Mental health

Mental health services aim at education and awareness raising, case detection, psychosocial management and referral of cases.

9. Emergency care

PHC centers provide an emergency and resuscitation service. The aim is to provide first aid and/ or initial management and to have arrangements to transfer patients to first referral facilities.

10. Food safety, environmental health and school health

Food safety and inspection services are carried out to prevent food-borne illnesses in schools, food handling places and establishments. Samples

are collected regularly and sent for investigation.

Environmental health control is provided through regular audit activities carried out by the PHC main centers where water samples are taken on a daily basis for analysis, and proper waste management is observed.

School health services are already being implemented but need further strengthening.

11. Health education

Health education activities are integrated into all services provided at the PHC centers. All clients attending PHC centers receive appropriate health education, information and support. Services are provided through:

face to face meetings, health education campaigns in high risk areas, social mobilization for different health programmes, health education material media.

12. Diagnostic services

Diagnostic laboratory and imaging services support effective delivery of health care. A range of appropriate laboratory tests is made available at each level of health facility matching the services offered.

13. Essential medicines

A standard list of essential medicines to satisfy the priority health care needs is selected from Iraq's National List. Essential medicines are intended to be available within the context of a functioning system at all times in adequate amounts.

Types of PHC Centers:

1- PHC main centers

There are three categories of PHC main centers:

Primary health care centers:

These are the centers that deliver all the primary health care services.

Primary health care training centers:

These centers offer the same services as above plus a training hall within the main building to deliver training activities for medical, paramedical staff of health facilities, medical institutions and medical school students.

Primary health care centers with delivery room and emergency unit:

These centers deliver the same services facilities in addition to emergency care services (for simple medical and surgical cases).

Main PHC centers are staffed by doctors, nurses, midwives, laboratory and pharmacy technicians.

The centers serve a population ranging from 10 000 – 30 000 and up to a maximum of 45 000 in centers with emergency and obstetric care services.

PHC main centers provide a wide range of preventive and curative services.

2- PHC Sub-centers:

These sub-centers deliver simple maternal and child health services, immunization activities and simple curative services. PHC sub-centers have no medical doctors. They are staffed by trained health workers (nurses or paramedics, and a vaccinator) and serve a population of 5000 – 10 000. Services offered include preventive and basic curative services and simple diagnostic procedures.