

# Summary Report

## Health Policy & Health Finance Knowledge Hub 2008-2013



Photo: The Pacific Flagship Course on Health Systems Strengthening and Health Financing, Nadi, Fiji, August 20-30, 2012

### Introduction

The Health Policy and Health Finance Knowledge Hub (HPHF Hub) was hosted by the Nossal Institute for Global Health at the University of Melbourne over a 5 year period from mid-2008 to mid-2013. Over this period, the Hub was successful in developing new Australian researcher collaborations with regional partners; creating new knowledge and understanding of the complex health financing and associated policy issues confronting health systems of low and middle income countries in the Asia-Pacific region; and in providing new tools and strategies to strengthen the financing and regulation of health in Cambodia, Laos, Indonesia, Vietnam, Papua New Guinea and the Pacific.

### What were our aims?

The HPHF Hub was one of four Knowledge Hubs addressing different aspects of health systems, funded by AusAID as part of the Knowledge Hubs for Health Initiative. The main aim of the initiative was to 'contribute to the quality and effectiveness of Australia's engagement in the health sector in the Asia Pacific region through expanded expertise and an expanded knowledge base that is of practical value and used by stakeholders'.

Acknowledging the relatively low levels of engagement by Australian researchers in health financing issues of countries in our region, the HPHF Hub proposed to achieve this aim through the following key objectives:

1. development of an academic centre in the area of health policy and financing;
2. generation of knowledge on health financing strategies and health systems policy making;
3. developing the capacity of Australian and regional researchers and policy makers in this area; and
4. communicating and disseminating knowledge to policy makers at regional and national levels.

### What did we do?

Following initial consultations with regional development organisations, country partners, and AusAID, the HPHF Hub focused its work on four thematic areas:

1. Pathways to universal coverage through equity enhancing financing strategies.
2. Stewardship of mixed public-private health systems.
3. Development assistance and health financing in the Pacific.
4. Policy challenges to address the rise of non-communicable diseases (NCDs).

These thematic areas address key elements of Universal Health Coverage (UHC): the collection and distribution of health finance; the regulation of access to health care services, and its quality; responding to the growing burden of NCDs; and the effective use of development assistance, particularly in the Pacific. Our work has responded to the growing

## Health Policy and Health Finance Knowledge Hub

complexity of health systems in the region, the increasing role of the private sector and the decentralisation of authority to sub-national levels of government, by focusing on the role of government as ‘steward’ and smart regulator of mixed public-private systems.

In collaboration with research partners in the region, the Hub has produced:

- 34 working papers reporting the results of studies and analysis within and across countries of the region;
- 7 papers published in peer-reviewed journals
- 16 in-depth policy and issue briefs summarising research and providing evidence-based recommendations for policy makers;
- 4 stories of change documenting the contribution of our work to changes in practice and policy; and
- 5 case studies describing our research process and its impact on policy.

These knowledge outputs have been communicated to policy makers through in-country consultations, workshops and policy dialogue events, and disseminated more widely through presentations at regional and international conferences, training programs, and through our website: [www.ni.unimelb.edu.au/hphf-hub/publications](http://www.ni.unimelb.edu.au/hphf-hub/publications). The outputs have contributed to policy changes at country level (such as in Indonesia and Cambodia), and also at regional level (such as Pacific regional strategies).

At the same time, the HPHF Hub has built capacity in Australia and the region among researchers to engage in health systems and policy research through knowledge sharing and joint learning on collaborative research. The HPHF Hub also convened and delivered more formal capacity building, through hosting study visits by research and policy fellows, and through formal teaching programs, such as the adaptation of the World Bank Health Systems Flagship course for the Pacific.

### What have we achieved?

(1) The nucleus of an academic centre in health financing has been established at the Nossal Institute, providing a focal point for Australian researchers interested in this area and a focal point of expertise for AusAID.

(2) The creation of knowledge in the form of new information, tools and strategies on a range of issues, such as the behaviour of health care workers who work in both public and private sectors and not-for-profit hospitals in Indonesia; the requirements for an institution to manage pooled funds in Cambodia; and the readiness of health systems in Bangladesh and Fiji to respond to NCDs.

(3) New capacities, partnerships and collaboration between Australian researchers, regional researchers and health policy makers, in health systems and policy issues. This has occurred at a country level, such as engagement between researchers and policy makers in national Ministries of Health; and at a regional level, such as the engagement of Australian

## Health Policy and Health Finance Knowledge Hub

researchers in the Asia Pacific Observatory on Health Systems and Policies, and the Asia Network for Capacity Building in Health Systems Strengthening.

(4) Communication and dissemination of this knowledge to policy makers, which has contributed to some early policy outcomes, including: policies for establishing a fund to amalgamate existing health equity funds in Cambodia; changes to the law on rights to taxation relief for not-for-profit hospitals in Indonesia; and recognition of the significant cost of excessive regional meetings for Pacific Island Countries in the draft AusAID Pacific strategy.

### Challenges and lessons learnt

(1) Building relationships with partner researchers in the region takes time and resources, but is essential for effective collaboration, understanding and engagement in the policy issues of individual countries.

(2) Developing in-depth understanding of specific country contexts and needs to inform the development of generalisable lessons and principles.

(3) Translating research and evidence on the issues facing regional country health systems and policy managers, into the implications for development assistance programs, and informing AusAID policy.

(4) The long time course and multiple factors involved in policy development mean that ongoing longer term monitoring and reporting will be needed to determine the impacts from the Hub knowledge outputs on policies and practices in target countries and among regional stakeholders.

### Looking forward

Ongoing outputs / outcomes will continue to influence health systems research and policy in the region, while further building Australian engagement and contribution of expertise to international and regional health systems development.

The Nossal Institute invites and encourages feedback. To provide comment, to get further information about the publications, or to download the publications, please visit our Health Policy and Health Finance Knowledge Hub website: <http://ni.unimelb.edu.au/hphf-hub> or e-mail us at [ni-info@unimelb.edu.au](mailto:ni-info@unimelb.edu.au)



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