HEALTH SITUATION

The burden of communicable and noncommunicable diseases in The Gambia is high. The causes of morbidity that drive the demand for public health services in children are acute respiratory infections, diarrhoeal diseases, helminthic infections and skin disorders. Cardiovascular diseases including hypertension, diabetes, cancers and trauma are the common diseases/conditions in adults. These health conditions are responsible for over 75% of the outpatient and inpatient care delivered through the government’s health care system.

The leading causes of inpatient deaths in children are: malaria, pneumonia, malnutrition, anaemia, neonatal sepsis, premature births, gastroenteritis, septicaemia and meningitis. In adults, the leading causes of inpatient deaths are maternal deaths, pneumonia, cerebrovascular accidents, trauma especially road traffic injuries, malaria, hypertension, anaemia, diabetes, heart failure and cancer.

The maternal mortality ratio (MMR) still remains unacceptably high. The main causes of maternal mortality are haemorrhages, eclampsia, anaemia, malaria in pregnancy and postpartum sepsis. Poor maternal nutrition contributes to complications during pregnancy and delivery, and shortage of skilled birth attendants further exacerbates the problem.

Some natural disasters do occur in The Gambia for example, floods and droughts. In addition, there are epidemics such as yellow fever, meningitis and cholera. Cancer, especially liver cancer, is secondary to hepatitis B infection which is prevalent in the country. The prevalence rate for hepatitis B infection is estimated at 90% but the chronic carrier rate is 15%.

HEALTH POLICIES AND SYSTEMS

The national Programme for Accelerated Growth and Employment (PAGE) 2012-2015, has identified health as a priority area of focus for enhancing economic development, in line with the National Vision 20/20 document. While a number of policies are in place at the programme level to steer health sector reform for better health service delivery and outcomes, the country is currently finalizing a national health strategic plan to implement the National Health Policy (2012-2020). The vision and mission of the National Health Policy is: Provision of quality and affordable health services for all by 2020 and to promote and protect the health of the population through the equitable provision of quality health care.

The government is the major provider of health services. The public health care system has three tiers, based on the primary health care strategy. Presently, services are provided by six hospitals at the tertiary level, 38 health centers at the secondary level and 492 health posts at the primary level. The system is complemented by 34 private and nongovernmental organization (NGO) clinics. For most communities, the first point of contact with health care services is the informal sector through traditional healers.

COOPERATION FOR HEALTH

The Gambia signed on to the global compact of the International Health Partnership and related initiative (IHP+) in May 2012, and is currently developing a country compact to guide the implementation of the national health strategic plan. As a result of the small number of multilateral organisations providing development assistance to the health sector, the role of UN Agencies is very important in terms of contribution to technical support in health.

Although WHO is the leading partner in health, other development partners have been supporting The Gambia’s effort in overall health development, including United Nations (UN) Agencies (UNAIDS, UNDP, UNFPA, UNHCR, UNICEF, WFP), the Global Alliance for Vaccines and Immunization (GAVI) and the Global Fund to fight AIDS, Tuberculosis and Malaria.

Bilateral Partners active in health include Cuba, Egypt, The European Union, Germany, Italy, Nigeria, Turkey, United Kingdom, USA, and Venezuela. Key multilateral partners include the African Development Bank, the European Development Fund, the Islamic Development Bank and the World Bank.
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<th>Strategic Priorities</th>
<th>Main Focus Areas for WHO Cooperation</th>
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| **STRATEGIC PRIORITY 1:** Reduce morbidity and mortality due to communicable diseases | • Support the development or review and implementation of national policies and strategic plans for malaria; HIV/AIDS and tuberculosis  
• Support the country’s epidemic alert and response mechanism and its capacity for the implementation of the International Health Regulations (IHR 2005) and the continued implementation and monitoring of the Integrated Disease Surveillance and Response (IDSR) system.  
• Support the maintenance of the high immunisation coverage |
| **STRATEGIC PRIORITY 2:** Reduce morbidity and mortality due to noncommunicable diseases and conditions and strengthen health promotion capacity at all levels. | • Support the development and implementation of a NCD policy  
• Support the development and implementation of a national health promotion policy and strategic plan; and a national road safety strategy  
• Support the implementation of the ratified WHO Framework Convention for Tobacco Control (FCTC) |
| **STRATEGIC PRIORITY 3:** Improve health and reduce maternal, neonatal and childhood morbidity and mortality | • Mobilize resources for the implementation of the Country Specific Road Map to accelerate reduction of maternal and newborn deaths  
• Support the expansion of the IMNCI strategy in all six Health Regions of the country and the implementation of other child survival strategies  
• Support the re-commissioning of the major health facilities for the provision of basic and comprehensive emergency obstetric care (EmOC) services and improve the referral system for complicated obstetric cases |
| **STRATEGIC PRIORITY 4:** Improve the healthcare delivery system in the country using PHC as the strategy while promoting evidence based decision making in the planning and management of health services delivery | • Support the implementation of the HRH Policy and Strategic plan including the retention of skilled health personnel  
• Strengthening the functional capacity of public health system at all levels, including the provision of technical assistance and support in the provision of operational logistics  
• Promoting evidence based decision making in the planning and management of health services delivery through supporting the strengthening of the Health Management Information System and research |
| **STRATEGIC PRIORITY 5:** Contribute to the improvement in the general standards of health of the population and address health consequences of emergencies | • Support the development and implementation of the national environmental health policy with emphasis on the provision of a sustainable waste management system  
• Support the formulation and implementation of health specific emergency preparedness and response plans  
• Support the implementation of the policy on occupational health and safety |