

Oman Primary Health Care in Action



Oman creates successful health system

In the late 1970s, the Sultanate of Oman had only a handful of health professionals. Many people had to travel up to four days just to reach a hospital, where hundreds of patients would already be waiting in line to see one of the country's few doctors, most of whom were expatriates.

All this changed in less than a generation, thanks to political commitment to health and oil revenues. Oman has invested consistently in a national health service and sustained that investment over time. There is now a network of 180 local, district and regional health facilities staffed by over 5000 health workers providing health care to the vast majority of Oman's 2.2 million citizens, with coverage now being extended to foreign residents.

Over 98% of births in Oman are attended by trained personnel and over 98% of infants are fully immunized. Life expectancy at birth, which was less than 60 years towards the end of the 1970s, now is about 74 years. The under-five mortality rate has dropped by a staggering 94%.

Current five-year plan

The primary health care system is based on the wilayat, or district, the unit of local administration that is the closest to the community. The central role of community health work to a primary health care approach was placed firmly on the international health agenda by World Health Organization Member States in the Declaration of Alma-Ata in 1978.

Under the five-year health plan for 2006–10¹, the Sultanate's goal is to ensure that 100% of the population are served by health centres and mobile health teams. By that time, the goal is to have 90% Arabic-speaking staff, including doctors and nurses. All primary health centres are to be equipped with basic laboratory and maternity services.

The goal is also to refine the hospital referral system through clear delineation of catchment areas, while medical records are to be digitalized in 75% of primary health centres to facilitate continued care.

- Oman close to universal access to health care within a generation
- Oman invested consistently in national health system
- Under-five mortality drops 94% in 30 years
- Oman health plan aims to provide health services to 100% of the population – universal coverage

Oman's primary health care successes are featured in the World Health Report 2008: Primary Health Care – Now more than ever².

Oman in numbers³

- Life expectancy (both sexes, 2006): 74 years
- Gross National Product per capita (PPP in international \$, 2005): 19 740
- Per capita total expenditure on health (PPP in international \$, 2005): 390
- Number of physicians (per 10 000 population, 2005): 17



A woman learns about family planning in Oman

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¹Moh Sultanate of Oman. http://www.moh.gov.om/nv_menu.php?fnm=policy/programs.php&SP=1 (date accessed 26/09/2008)

²World Health Organization, World Health Report 2008: Primary health Care: Now More than Ever, WHO, Geneva, October 2008.

³World Health Statistics 2008, Online version: <http://www.who.int/whosis/data/Search.jsp> (accessed on 26/09/2008)