Background

The highest attainable standard of health, including access to timely, acceptable, and affordable health care of appropriate quality is a fundamental right of every human being. Primary health care (PHC), as first-access care, with the capacity to address the vast majority of health problems, has long been recognized as critical to attaining health for all. Numerous international reviews have bolstered this claim, demonstrating that health systems based on high-performing PHC are able to achieve better health outcomes, more equitably, and at lower relative cost to those that over emphasize disease-specific and hospital-based care.

It is undeniable that strong PHC is foundational to achieving health for all, as well as today’s leading global health movements including Universal Health Coverage, Health System Strengthening, Health System Resilience, Integrated People-centred Health Services, and health related Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). Yet, too often the potential for dramatic improvements in the health of populations and function of health systems by PHC are undermined by lack of emphasis and underinvestment. In addition, in most countries, very little is known about the performance of PHC, particularly in domains that are critical to its effectiveness but often not measured: access, comprehensiveness, continuity, coordination, people-centredness, and quality. Improved measurement of PHC performance, with measures relevant to community, facility, district and national processes, is needed to promote accountability and guide improvement efforts at each level. Through rational measurement of what drives strong primary health care systems, and better utilization of this data for improvement by stakeholders at all levels of the health system, there is tremendous opportunity to have a major impact on health.

Several recent collaborative efforts by international development agencies have drawn further attention to this area including the Health Data Collaborative (HDC). HDC seeks to facilitate and accelerate progress in strengthening country systems for monitoring progress and performance for accountability within the context of the health related SDGs and the Primary Health Care Performance Initiative (PHCPI). PHCPI brings together partners to improve PHC in low- and middle-income countries through better measurement, country-level improvement and knowledge-sharing.

As a key next step, this meeting serves to engage leadership of Member States, partner organizations, international development associations, academic partners and WHO toward a common agenda for PHC measurement and improvement. Stakeholder input is required to shape the concrete steps needed to advance the measurement and improvement agenda: (1) improved performance measurement (2) research and development for under-measured domains (3) performance improvement.

Meeting Purpose

1. Create a platform for shared learning on national and subnational measurement and on use of information for improving PHC;
2. Refine a work plan for improved PHC performance measurement including research and development of less measured domains of quality PHC and incorporation of these measures into existing measurement platforms; and
3. Review and shape strategy for PHC improvement efforts including the development of relevant guidance and tools and the WHO Global Challenge on Primary Health Care Improvement.