

Public Sector

Ministry of Health



Introduction

The Ministry of Health (MOH) oversees the health sector in most developing countries. This ministry is typically responsible for setting policy related to the overall health sector (public and private) as well as provision of services at primary-, secondary- and tertiary-level public facilities. In addition to the Minister, key positions include the Permanent Secretary, Chief Medical Officer, Chief Epidemiologist, and Health Planner. While each country's Ministry of Health may be organized differently, most generally have the following departments:

- Health Policy and Planning
- Health Promotion
- Procurement/Drug Regulatory Authority
- Human Resources/Licensing
- Disease Control
- Clinical Services
- Community Health
- Public Affairs

Given its important role as steward of the health system, teams typically engage MOH officials in the assessment process, and interview key representatives as noted below.

Questions—Enabling Environment

Permanent Secretary or Health Planner

- What are the current challenges in financing the health system and health services?
- What health services are subsidized by the government?
- Has the country assembled a comprehensive, multi-year health strategy plan and budget?
- Has the country defined an Essential Health Package (EHP)? If so, what is included? Does the government contract with the private sector to deliver the EHP services?
- Are there specific plans for working with the private health sector?
- Does the country have a national health insurance (NHI) program? If so, who is covered and for what type of services?
- If the country does not have NHI, has the country considered implementing such an insurance scheme? If so, where are you in the process?
- If not, are there existing schemes or efforts under way to make health products and services more affordable for the poor?
- What are the challenges with the importation of health equipment and products?
- Are there government-imposed limitations on prices of health products?

- Is financing available for construction/infrastructure improvements and/or equipment for private health facilities?
- Are there private health financing needs that you support? If so, please describe them.
- What are the gaps in financing for private health services and products?
- How can they be addressed?
- Does the Ministry of Health regulate any form of health insurance (such as community-based or micro-insurance)?
- If so, what policies are in place that affect these health insurance schemes?
- Are there policies in place that dictate the price at which the government purchases goods and services from the private sector?
- How does the government oversee the quality of any purchasing arrangements with the private sector?
- Does the government have effective contracting out policies and procedures? If so, what services has the government contracted out?
- Does the government have a formal Public-Private Partnership policy? If so, how has it been applied or implemented?
- Does the government have any policy on gender equality that the Ministry applies to its operations and programs?

Questions—Service Delivery

Chief Medical Officer

- In what capacity have you worked with the private health sector?
- Who are the key actors in the private health sector?
- Does the Ministry of Health maintain a registry of private health facilities? If so, which unit/individual has responsibility for maintaining the registry?
- What are the requirements for establishing and operating a private health facility?
- Does the Ministry of Health regularly inspect private health facilities?
- How do you monitor the quality of private health services?

Human Resources Officer

- What are the established cadres for health workers?
- What are the required qualifications for each cadre? (Example: licensing requirements.)
- Do you know what the proportion is of men/women in each cadre?
- Has the scope of practice recently changed for any cadre of provider?
- Have certain responsibilities/procedures been transferred between cadres of providers (task-shifting)? If so, please describe.
- Does the Ministry of Health maintain a registry of private health providers?
- Does the Ministry of Health play a role in licensing or certifying private health providers?

- Are there requirements for re-licensing? If so, what challenges does the Ministry in enforcing this mandate?
- Do private providers face any obligations for public sector service?
- Are health providers employed by the government allowed to maintain a private practice (known as dual practice)?
- What do you see as benefits or drawbacks of dual practice?
- What is the demand for medical education? Are there sufficient slots for medical and nursing students?
- How many health workers by cadre graduate each year? Do you know what the proportion is of men/women in each cadre?
- What issues does the public sector have in recruiting and retaining health workers? Do you find that recruitment and/or retention issues differ for women versus men workers?
- How often do health workers leave the public sector to work in the private sector?

Dual Practice

- Are doctors/midwives that work for the public sector allowed to ESTABLISH a private clinic/hospital?
- Are doctors/midwives that work for the public sector allowed to WORK IN a private clinic/hospital?
- [If yes] In what capacity: Employees? Fee-split arrangements? Flat fee for performing a hospital shift?
- What are the rules regarding dual practice? [Obtain copies of the legislation that pertains to dual practice.]
- Are there any exceptions?
- What is happening in practice? Why?
- Are there any consequences for those infringing upon the law?
- What changes in legislation are needed – if any – to make dual practice more beneficial to the public?

Questions—Supply Chain

[See also Drug Regulatory Authority]

- What is the registration process for new health products? How long does it take?
- Are there government controls on pricing to ensure access for the poor?
- Are these controls in place in both the public and private sector?
- What is the process to obtain a license to manufacture products in the country?
- How are products certified?
- Are there restrictions on importing products?
- Does the government conduct facility inspections to authorize or register products from foreign manufacturers?
- What is the process to obtain a license to distribute products?
- What are the tariffs for sales in the private sector?
- Are any classes of products exempt?
- What have been the greatest challenges related to standards for health products in the country?
- How does the Ministry of Health/drug regulatory body ensure the quality of distributed products?
- What does the government do to prevent importation or manufacture of counterfeit or substandard

Questions—Health Information

Health Promotion Officer/Public Affairs Officer

- Are there specific health areas that face restrictions on the use of mass media?
- Is there any process to monitor the content of messages?
- Are there restrictions on branding of certain pharmaceuticals?
- Are there standards of practice for counseling and informed consent?
- How do each of these differ between the public and private sectors?

NOTE: It may be difficult to secure interviews with high-level officials within the MOH. If this is the case, teams should look to national strategic plans and other health documents to fill any information gaps.