

# FIRST GLOBAL SYMPOSIUM ON HEALTH SYSTEMS RESEARCH

Science to accelerate universal health coverage

16-19 November 2010, Montreux, Switzerland

**No other \$ 5 trillion economic sector would be happy with so little investment in research related to its core agenda: the reduction of health inequalities; the organization of people-centred care; and the development of better, more effective public policies. — The world health report 2008**

Mark your calendar now – the World Health Organization and partners will convene the inaugural global symposium on health systems research on 16-19 November 2010. Researchers, policy-makers, funders, and other stakeholders representing diverse constituencies will gather in Montreux, Switzerland to share evidence, identify significant knowledge gaps, and set a research agenda that reflects the needs of low- and middle-income countries.



## More and better health systems research

Health systems research – the purposeful generation of knowledge that enables societies to organize themselves to improve health outcomes and health services – is rapidly emerging as one of the most dynamic and complex areas of research for health.

Awareness is growing among politicians, policy-makers, health-care providers and researchers that the evidence base to support the theory and practice of strengthening health systems is not strong, especially in low- and middle-income countries. Moreover, the scientific foundations for this type of research are in need of significant development and improvement.

Calls for more and better health systems research are not new, but they have recently been given a boost. In November 2008, the High Level Task Force on Scaling up Research and Learning for Health Systems<sup>1</sup> recommended: 1) a high profile agenda of research, 2) the engagement of policy-makers in this agenda, 3) stronger country and global capacity for research, and 4) increased financing for health systems research. This four-point agenda was presented to the Global Ministerial Forum on Research for Health where it was unanimously endorsed in the Bamako Call to Action on research for health. Among the Task Force's recommendations was a global symposium on health systems research in 2010.

In June 2009, further support was advocated in a report to the Task Force on Innovative International Financing for Health Systems<sup>2</sup> which recommended: increasing the capacity of institutions in low- and middle-income countries to conduct high-quality health systems research; enhancing the capacity of policy-makers to apply evidence throughout the policy process; and supporting more multi-country studies to provide generalizable findings.

The time is ripe to harness this energy and generate – as fast as possible – more and better health systems research to improve health outcomes, health services and health equity.

## Universal health coverage

The first symposium will be dedicated to improving the scientific evidence needed by health policy-makers and practitioners to inform their decisions related to accelerating universal health coverage.

Achieving and sustaining universal health coverage requires attention to a broad range of issues that are central to health systems performance. This includes drawing on the six interdependent health system building blocks – finance, workforce, services, technologies, information, and governance – and understanding how policies and programmes from within and beyond the health sector can be developed and implemented effectively, efficiently, and equitably.

Although universal health coverage is highly country and context specific, rigorous scientific research has the potential to generate evidence to inform better policy and practice within and across countries. For example, robust methodologies could be instrumental in identifying how the services for HIV, tuberculosis, malaria, immunization and maternal and child health can be scaled up to reach the poor and disadvantaged more quickly and sustainably in low-income countries. Similarly, prospective monitoring and evaluation of universal health coverage policies in middle-income countries can help to better target the vulnerable populations and make important mid-course corrections.

## The symposium's objectives

The specific objectives of the symposium are to:

- share state-of-the art research on universal health coverage;
- develop a global agenda of priority research on accelerating progress towards universal health coverage;
- facilitate greater research collaboration and learning communities across disciplines, sectors, initiatives and countries;
- strengthen the scientific rigor of the field of health systems research including concepts, frameworks, measures and methods;
- identify mechanisms for strengthening capacities – individual, institutional and infrastructural – for research on health systems particularly in low- and middle-income countries.

## Who should attend?

- Researchers from low-, middle- and high-income countries interested in health systems research
- Health policy analysts
- National health policy-makers
- Representatives of multilateral organizations
- Representatives of donor governments and private foundations interested in funding health systems research in low- and middle-income countries
- Non-state actors from international and national NGOs, civil society, and the private sector.

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<sup>1</sup> The report is available at [www.who.int/alliance-hpsr/alliancehpsr\\_task\\_force\\_report\\_research.pdf](http://www.who.int/alliance-hpsr/alliancehpsr_task_force_report_research.pdf)

<sup>2</sup> Working Group 1 Report: Constraints to scaling up and costs. Available at [www.internationalhealthpartnership.net/taskforce.html](http://www.internationalhealthpartnership.net/taskforce.html)

## How is the symposium being organized?

A Steering Committee has been set up to oversee the development and organization of the Symposium. The membership of the Committee includes representatives from other UN agencies, donor governments, and private foundations, and senior health policy-makers from developing countries. In order to ensure scientific rigour and robustness of the outputs emanating from the Symposium, a Scientific Committee will also be set up to provide technical inputs into the organization of the Symposium. The membership of this Committee will comprise leaders of the scientific research community interested in health systems research in both developed and developing countries. A small WHO-based secretariat is set up and responsible for the organization, administrative and operational support in the planning and preparation of the Symposium. A growing number of international organizations, donor governments, private foundations, and research partnership programmes are co-sponsoring the Symposium. As more partners join, we will update the current list of logos to reflect the additions.

The four-day event will include plenary sessions, concurrent sessions, panel and working group discussions, and poster presentations.

A call for abstracts on science to accelerate universal health coverage will be announced in late 2009. All information related to background documents, committee members, registration, abstract submission and the programme will be posted at relevant WHO websites.

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