

The imperative of good governance and enhanced learning systems for resilient health financing



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After the COVID-19 pandemic, health systems prioritised the mitigation of human casualties caused by SARS-CoV-2, addressing the post-COVID-19 condition (also known as long COVID), and grappling with other ramifications of the pandemic, including the disruption and postponement of essential health services, an increased burden of mental health disorders, and shortages of essential medical supplies. The pandemic highlighted the fragility of health financing policies, particularly in countries with vulnerable economic situations.¹ Hence, health policy makers are now confronted with the crucial question of what strategies should be devised to establish resilient health financing systems to effectively protect health systems from future shocks without impeding progress towards universal health coverage (UHC).

Chuan De Foo and colleagues² empirically investigated health financing policies during the COVID-19 pandemic, using data from 15 countries. The authors developed a framework for resilient health financing within the context of UHC, and noted that, in response to the COVID-19 pandemic, many countries implemented a range of policy initiatives to absorb financial shocks of health system, enhance their response capabilities, and facilitate recovery and sustainability. We commend the authors for their valuable study. Effective implementation of the framework hinges on establishing good governance and adopting a learning system approach. Good governance, which involves decisions that affect a health system's economic performance and the wellbeing of its people within a complex political context,³ has a pivotal role in the fight against corruption and fraud in health financing. These dishonest practices and unethical behaviours lead to resource misallocation, financial waste, and adverse effects on health-care accessibility, infrastructure, and financing.⁴ Good governance combats corruption and fraud in health financing primarily by improving accountability and effectiveness through evidence-based policy making, transparent decision-making processes, clear implementation procedures, and openness to input from the public.^{5,6}

During the absorb and recover phase of a crisis, characterised by a country's efforts to absorb the initial

shocks to its health-care systems and develop strategies to rebound, addressing the accumulated backlog of postponed medical attention, it becomes imperative to continuously monitor the composition of financial resources allocated to health-care expenditure and revenue generated. This adaptation is crucial to respond effectively to evolving health-care demands. Assessing the impact of health financing policies on various health system components, such as human resources, governance, service delivery, and resource generation, is crucial for making necessary adjustments.

To enhance accountability, transparency, and responsiveness, accessible and understandable information must be provided to relevant stakeholders. Furthermore, aligning policies and implementation with existing laws and regulations is essential for promoting good governance.

An enhanced learning system incorporates robust information technology infrastructure that facilitates comprehensive digital data capture, timely sharing of well analysed data, rapid generation of research evidence, and practical decision support for all stakeholders, encompassing patients, service providers, and policy makers at all levels. Cultivating a culture of continuous learning, adaptation, and innovation is essential for addressing emerging financing challenges and ensuring the resilience of the health financing system.^{7,8}

Our experience shows that to establish a learning system, policy makers should enhance stakeholders' learning capabilities and involve patients, families, and communities in decision making. Understanding people's health behaviours in crisis and non-crisis situations, empowering them in making effective financial decisions, raising awareness and practices of healthy lifestyle choices, strengthening primary health care, and preventing unnecessary medical care can influence health financial resources and system costs. During the sustain phase of a crisis, during which health systems sustain and enhance fiscal space for health to progress towards UHC while strengthening resilient health financing systems that can effectively respond to future health emergencies, health policy makers must assess various arrangements, including financing, service delivery, and governance, in

light of their acquired knowledge to effectively rebuild and prepare for future crises.

By establishing good governance and enhancing the learning system, we can successfully navigate the absorb, recover, and sustain phases of a crisis, moving towards more stable phases centred on prevention and preparation for future crises. Building capacity to enhance adaptability during change is crucial in the preparation phase. Here, a situation analysis is necessary to identify gaps in health financing and initiate transformative changes in its functions and service delivery.⁹ This analysis contributes to the development of long-term plans and the formulation of evidence-based policies for the resilience of the health financing system, equipping governments, communities, and individuals more effectively for future crises.

We declare no competing interests.

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