



# Health policies revisited

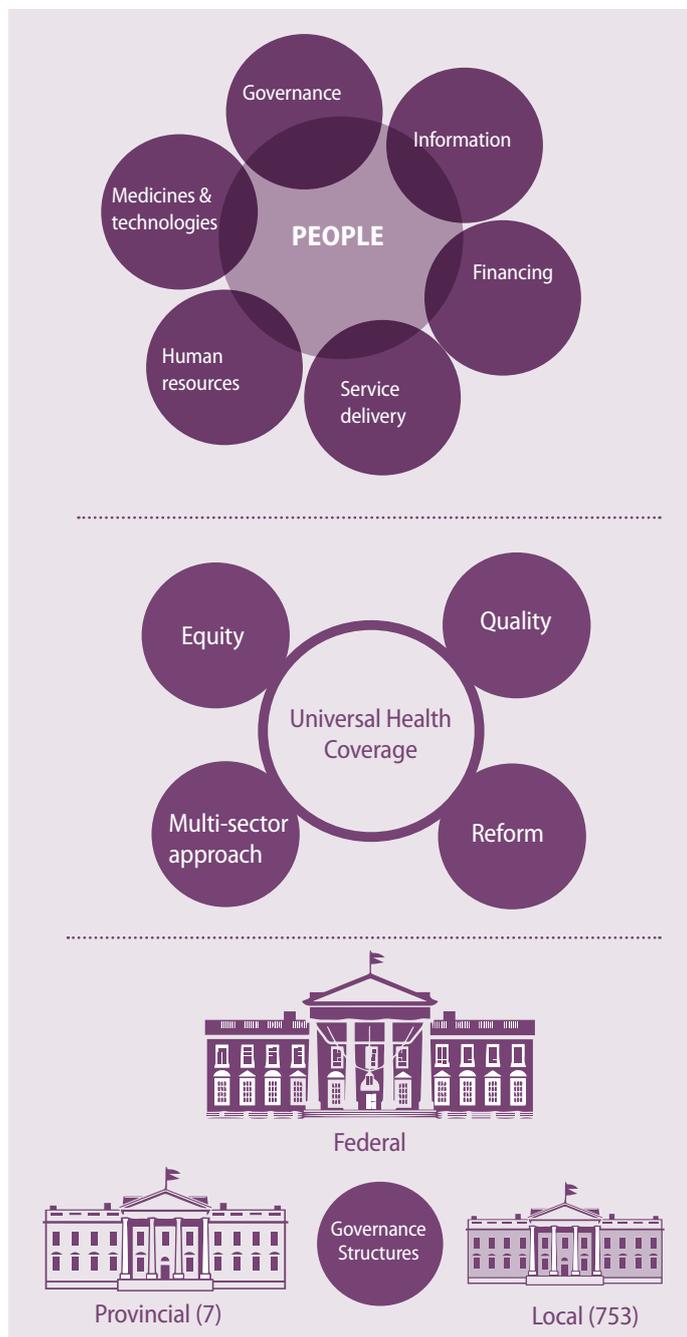
A review of 22 health sector policies—a part of a broader effort to ensure improved alignment of the country’s legal provisions and policies within the spirit of the Constitution and providing a blueprint for the health sector to better navigate the new federalized context

**A**s mandated by the Constitution of Nepal, the country has now transitioned to a federal structure, with three tiers of government—federal, provincial and local levels—being already formed and functioning. This devolution demands systems reform in the sector which is an ongoing process.

This demarcation demands organizational reform, which is an ongoing process. In that vein, various adjustments have been planned for different sectors, including review and revision of several existing legal provisions and policies to ensure better alignment with in the spirit of the Constitution.

As part of the broader effort that health-related policies were also reviewed, to enable health sector to better navigate the changed context of decentralized governance in the country, and to bring to fruition the Constitution’s vision of improved and equal access to quality health services for all. A total of 22 policies prevailing in health sector were reviewed (table below).

## THREE PERSPECTIVES OF ANALYSIS



- **Health system building blocks:** The majority of the policies were found to focus on governance, followed by service delivery. Infrastructure, equipment, pharmaceuticals and laboratories were policy areas that received the least attention.
- **Strategic directions of the Nepal Health Sector Strategy (NHSS) 2015-2020:** Most of the policies were found to have captured system reform and quality dimensions, while equity and multi- sectoral was less pronounced.
- **Governance structure in Federalism:** Most policy statements were found to be applicable to the federal level, while some were relevant for all three levels. As anticipated, provincial-level functions were comparatively less pronounced in the reviewed policies than those at the federal or local-levels.

# WAY FORWARD

- Develop an umbrella health policy at the federal level that covers the health system building blocks and which clearly sets out the responsibilities of all tiers of the government.
- The constitution vests all levels of government with the authority to develop their own policies and laws. But for any given tier of government to exercise this authority in coming up with effective health-related policies in the future, they will have to critically review the functions assigned to them.
- Rather than developing thematic policies, prioritise developing standards, operating procedures, guidelines for thematic and programmatic areas as applicable in line with the assigned functions.
- Follow the standard policy format of the Government of Nepal in developing policies in health.
- Consider service and programme areas that are specifically provisioned in the constitution and legal documents—such as basic health services, health insurance, safe motherhood and immunization, among others—when developing policies.
- Develop a law governing the overall management of the health sector to guarantee delivery of services that constitute citizens' fundamental rights.
- Critical devolved functions, such as blood transfusion services, procurement and supply chain management, requires clear policy provisions across all levels of government
- Since several policies have been drafted in the health sector, their fundamental aspects should be considered in developing the

relevant policy, guidelines, and Standard Operating Procedures.

- Offer clear directions in revised policies and strategies for effective partnerships between the government and the private and non-governmental sectors, among other stakeholders, in health sector.
- In line with the enacted Acts in the health sector like the Health Insurance Act, the federal government should prioritise developing regulations while the provincial and local government could develop their laws in line with the federal Acts

- Ensure that the policy revision covers existing social health protection schemes that are being implemented by the government, such as basic health services, provision of free drugs, free treatment for underprivileged people, and health insurance packages.
- Set clear demarcations and interfaces for coordination between basic health services and health packages made available via social protection schemes like health insurance.
- Periodic reviews of the implementation status of health sector policies should be practiced.

## EXISTING POLICIES IN THE HEALTH SECTOR

| SN | Policy  | Year | Previous version |
|----|---|------|------------------|
| 1  | Disability Prevention Policy                        | 2017 |                  |
| 2  | National Health Policy                              | 2014 | 1991             |
| 3  | National Blood Transfusion Policy                   | 2014 | 1993, 2006       |
| 4  | National Population Policy                          | 2014 |                  |
| 5  | Urban Health Policy                                 | 2014 | 2010             |
| 6  | National Health Insurance Policy                    | 2013 |                  |
| 7  | National Oral Health Policy                         | 2013 | 2004             |
| 8  | National Health Laboratory Policy                   | 2013 |                  |
| 9  | National Health Communication Policy                | 2012 |                  |
| 10 | National Policy on HIV and STI                      | 2010 | 1995             |
| 11 | National Health Research Policy                     | 2010 | 2003             |
| 12 | Policy on Quality Assurance in Health Care Services | 2007 |                  |
| 13 | National Skill Birth Attendant Policy               | 2006 |                  |
| 14 | Healthcare Technology Policy                        | 2004 |                  |
| 15 | National Nutrition Policy                           | 2004 |                  |
| 16 | National Safe Abortion Policy                       | 2003 |                  |
| 17 | National Medicine Policy                            | 2001 | 1995             |
| 18 | Multi-dose Vial policy                              | 2000 |                  |
| 19 | Policy on Multi-dose Vaccine Vials                  | 2000 |                  |
| 20 | National Safe Motherhood Policy                     | 1998 |                  |
| 21 | National Mental Health Policy                       | 1996 |                  |
| 22 | National Ayurveda Health Policy                     | 1996 |                  |