Course on Health Systems Assessment and Diagnosis

October 23rd, 2025

Background

The course on Health System Assessment is organized by the Public Health Foundation of India (PHFI). The course is directed and conducted by faculty and researchers from the Harvard T.H. Chan School of Public Health (Harvard).

Organizers

The Harvard T.H. Chan School of Public Health

At the forefront of global public health education, The Harvard T.H. Chan School of Public Health leverages decades of experience in researching health systems worldwide. Our faculty and researchers have been instrumental in shaping policy and designing health systems in India, as well as in comparable countries.

The Public Health Foundation of India (PHFI)

PHFI is a public private initiative that has collaboratively evolved through consultations with multiple constituencies including Indian and international academia, state and central governments, multi& bi-lateral agencies and civil society groups. PHFI is a response to redress the limited institutional capacity in India for strengthening course, research and policy development in the area of Public Health.

About the Course

Systematic, evidence-based health system assessments and diagnosis are essential for driving impactful health reforms. A health system's performance is measured by its ability to achieve both end goals and intermediate outcomes. Unlike traditional evaluations of specific interventions and programs, these diagnostic strategies and assessments require a holistic approach that encompasses all facets of the health system, extending beyond basic indicators like mortality and morbidity.

This course on Health System Assessments and Diagnosis adopts Harvard's Getting Health Reform Right Framework, a pioneering approach to analysing health systems. Participants will learn the methodologies and data necessary for conducting comprehensive assessments and diagnosis, enriched with case studies from India and other nations. This course is designed to equip participants with the tools to evaluate and enhance health system performance effectively.

Course Objectives

- This course aims to equip participants with a robust conceptual framework and systematic processes for conducting health system assessments and diagnosis, with a focus on India's unique contextual realities.
- Participants will learn the critical importance of examining health system design, identifying key aspects to measure, and understanding how to evaluate a health system's performance comprehensively.
- Our goal is to support researchers and practitioners in the practical task of conducting health system assessments and diagnostics. This includes identifying the underlying causes of both successful and poor performance and leveraging evidence to inform and design effective health system reforms.

Course Structure

The course will consist of multiple modules, each with interactive and participatory webinar sessions. Although each session will be conducted as a standalone webinar, the topics are interlinked. Participants interested in learning about comprehensive health system assessments will benefit the most by participating in the entire course. Participants would have the choice to select the modules they want to attend and benefit from. However, only those participants who attend the entire course will be awarded completion certificates.

Module Sessions

1. Introduction to the Health Systems Assessment Framework
2. Introduction to Health System Assessment and Diagnosis
3. Ethics and Setting Priorities for Health System Reform
4. Equity analysis underlying the different health system goals
5. Assessment and Diagnosis of Health Status
6. Assessment and Diagnosis of Financial Risk Protection
7. Assessment and Diagnosis of Public Satisfaction
8. Assessment and Diagnosis of Access
9. Assessment and Diagnosis of Quality
10. Assessment and Diagnosis of Efficiency

Session 1:

Introduction to the Health Systems Assessment Approach

Instructors: *Michael Reich & Winnie Yip*

Overview of the Getting Health Reform Right Framework: This session provides an overview of the Getting Health Reform Right Framework and its relevance to Universal Health Coverage (UHC). The Getting Health Reform Right Framework helps policymakers diagnose health system issues, design reforms, and manage the reform process. Key features include a rigorous method for problem definition and policy development tailored to each country's context, focusing on technical, ethical, and political analysis. The session aims to introduce the main elements of the Getting Health Reform Right Framework, linking it to the challenges of UHC in India, particularly Ayushman Bharat. Topics covered include the health reform cycle, key elements of the approach, causal analysis, health systems analysis, and applying the getting health reform right framework to UHC. Key messages highlight the importance of considering politics and ethics in health reform, the need for health system strengthening to advance UHC, and the necessity of understanding why health systems underperform to improve them. Discussion questions will explore the goals and policy levers within the Getting Health Reform Right Framework, definitions of health systems, and the interaction of technical, political, and ethical analyses.

Session 2:

Assessment of Health System Performance and Diagnosis of Performance Problems

Instructors: *Michael Reich & Winnie Yip*

(2a) Assessment of Ultimate and Intermediate Outcomes- This session focuses on assessing ultimate and intermediate outcomes of health systems. It aims to help participants understand the three primary objectives of health systems: improving health status, reducing financial risks, and increasing citizen satisfaction. Measurement issues related to these ultimate objectives will be discussed. Additionally, the session will cover the intermediate outcomes of access, efficiency, and quality, exploring their roles in determining health system performance and the associated measurement challenges. Participants will consider examples from the assessment of health system performance in Odisha, India, to differentiate between ultimate and intermediate objectives. They will also discuss the

measurement challenges and the role of equity and distributional aspects in these performance objectives.

(2b) Diagnosis-Identifying Causes of Performance Problems: This segment on diagnosing performance problems in health systems introduces the Getting Health Reform Right Framework's approach to identifying and addressing these issues. Reformers are urged to pinpoint areas where the health system is underperforming and work backwards to uncover the root causes, proposing changes in control knobs as solutions. This method is aligned with modern process and quality improvement practices. The session highlights the diagnostic tree tool, which helps identify causes of performance problems, and demonstrates its application through relevant examples. Participants will learn about the diagnostic tree approach, its use in the Getting Health Reform Right Framework, and its role in linking causes with control knobs. The session will include working through examples of diagnostic analysis specific to the Indian context and preparing participants for group diagnostic work. The session will cover where diagnostic analysis fits in the Getting Health Reform Right Framework, the key features of the diagnostic tree, examples of diagnosing performance problems, and guidance for conducting personal diagnoses. Key messages emphasize that health system performance issues are often interlinked, with multiple interconnected causes contributing to poor performance. Improving outcomes typically requires addressing several control knobs simultaneously. Participants will also consider recent reform proposals in their state or country, discussing whether a causal diagnosis was undertaken and the roles of government or external units in conducting such diagnoses.

Session 3:
Ethics and Setting Priorities for Health System Reform
Instructors: *Michael Reich*

Ethics and Setting Priorities for Health System Reform: This session will begin by discussing the basic principles of ethics related to health system reform choices and the major ethical challenges in priority setting for health reform and universal health coverage, including financial risk protection. A case about setting priorities for Ayushman Bharat will follow, focusing on deciding the next steps towards universal health coverage at the state level. Participants will prepare arguments for and against five options in small groups, which will then be discussed by the entire class.

The objectives are to explore the choices necessary for moving towards universal

During the session, participants will be divided into small groups, each assigned one of the five reform options described in the case. They will prepare arguments for and against their assigned option, report back to the class, and engage in a general discussion on the pros and cons of the various choices. The presenter will summarize the discussion, linking it to priority-setting and ethics. Key messages include the necessity of making difficult choices in resource-limited settings to expand coverage towards UHC, the various ways of considering equity and fairness in these decisions, and the often implicit or unexamined ethical implications of different coverage expansion decisions. Participants will discuss and reflect on ethical theories, their application in health policies and reforms, and the specifics of the Ayushman Bharat case. They will consider arguments for universal versus targeted coverage expansions, the importance of feasibility, cost-effectiveness, budget impact, and political consequences in decision-making. Finally, they will contemplate which option they would advise the Secretary of Health to prioritize in their state.

Forthcoming Sessions

Session 4:
Equity analysis underlying the different health system goals

Session 5:
Assessment and Diagnosis of Health Status

Session 6:
Assessment and Diagnosis of Financial Risk Protection

Protection from the financial risks of healthcare costs is a key aim of health systems. When financial risk protection is poor, high healthcare costs may result in families foregoing basic needs like education, food and housing, or otherwise be pushed into poverty. Health insurance and government subsidies for healthcare

are some of the key strategies used to ensure financial risk protection, but their effectiveness can vary depending on the health system and policy design. This session will provide an introduction to measuring and assessing financial risk protection. It will cover in depth the standard metrics used for financial risk protection and the data and methods used to assess this measure of health system performance. We will compare performance across countries and interpret the strengths and weaknesses of different indicators and data used to measure and understand financial risk protection. The session will have a special focus on the large datasets capturing financial risk protection available in the Indian context and how they do and do not lend themselves to effective measurement. Gaps in existing datasets and the kind of data that could be useful to address these gaps will also be covered. This session is designed for participants with research experience in public health, health systems, health policy, and health services. Familiarity with national datasets and experience with statistics and quantitative analysis is preferred.

Session 7:
Assessment and Diagnosis of Public Satisfaction

One of the key goals of a health system, citizen satisfaction is the degree to which citizens or the public are satisfied with the health system. Measuring citizen satisfaction is important because members of the public are beneficiaries and actors in a health system, capable of providing feedback on the quality and responsiveness of services. Their opinions can be important in shaping health policies and bringing legitimacy and accountability to the policymaking process. Citizen satisfaction research remains undertheorized, and there are very few data sets that include variables needed to assess it, especially in low- and middle-income countries like India. Understanding the determinants of citizens' satisfaction with a country's or state's health system has merit beyond its political and strategic value to reformers. More broadly, high public satisfaction with specific services such as health care is linked with higher trust in public institutions, which is an important element in the effective functioning of democratic governments.

This session will introduce the concept of citizen satisfaction and its importance in India. The session will cover the different data sets and survey items that have been used to measure citizen satisfaction worldwide. Drawing on primary research from India and other countries, the session will discuss the key correlates of citizen satisfaction, as well as some pitfalls of common measurement indices.

The session is designed for participants interested in health, health systems, and health policy. Some familiarity with the Indian health system, health policies, and programs is desired.

Session 8:
Assessment and Diagnosis of Access

A well-functioning health system ensures that access to care will generate improved population health outcomes. Yet the interrelated and complex dynamics of a health system make it challenging to pinpoint which health systems dynamics will ensure that health care is well organized, delivered effectively, distributed efficiently and accessed fairly. How effectively citizens access care from the health system provides important insights for how well a health system functions. This session will cover one of the key intermediate outcomes of the health system: access. The session will focus on the data and methodological needs for measuring access to care and equity in use of health services. Drawing on data and examples from the Indian context, this session will include a presentation of methods to assess access, followed by group questions and discussion. Reading material will be shared before the session.

This session is open to participants interested in population health, the social determinants of health, and health care delivery and performance. Familiarity with national datasets will be helpful, but not required.

Session 9:
Assessment and Diagnosis of Quality

Quality of care is one of the most important intermediate outcomes of a health system. However, quality has unfortunately, been long neglected by most health reformers in low- and middle- income countries like India. Quality has three distinct aspects: clinical effectiveness, patient centeredness, and patient safety. This session will focus on the first aspect – clinical effectiveness.

Clinical effectiveness is the provision of health services based on scientific knowledge and avoiding both overuse of inappropriate care and underuse of effective care. Clinical processes, such as providing the correct clinical assessment, diagnosis, or treatment, are the cornerstones of effective care. The most important consideration for clinical effectiveness is the extent to which a diagnosis or treatment advice is based on evidence or standard guidelines and are shown to

impact health outcomes. Without clinically effective care, i.e., correct treatment and diagnosis, access to and utilization of healthcare are often meaningless. This session will introduce the concept of clinical effectiveness and the different ways in which it can be measured. Drawing on primary research in India and examples from the COVID-19 pandemic, this session will discuss the importance of focusing on clinical effectiveness in health reforms and raise some key challenges in achieving this in India.

The session is designed for clinicians, practitioners, and researchers who are interested in understanding quality assessments and brainstorming about ways to improve quality of healthcare in India. Some familiarity with symptoms and basic primary level treatment advice for common illness conditions like tuberculosis, pre-eclampsia, and heart attack is desired.

Session 10:
Assessment and Diagnosis of Efficiency

Conducting a data-driven analysis of a health system is critical for supporting health reform designs. This idea stems from the Getting Health Systems Right Framework, where a health system is defined as "a set of relationships where the structural components (means) and their interactions are associated and connected to the goals the system desires to achieve (ends)". Any successful reform, therefore, mustbe based on a systematic means-ends analysis. The first step in such an analysis is to evaluate health system performances, including three final goals (health status, citizen satisfaction, and financial risk protection) and three intermediate goals (access, efficiency, and quality of care). The intermediate goals are characteristic of the system that "are critical links in the chains that connect root causes to ultimate performance goals." The objective of this session is to provide a practical guide on how to assess the efficiency of a health system.

This session is intended for analysts interested in conducting a diagnosis of a healthcare delivery system, and thus, will focus on the issues of measurement and analysis of efficiency. Despite the recent emphasis on the need for efficiency in individual health organizations and the health system as a whole, there is a surprising absence of a standardized approach to measuring efficiency or of a comprehensive list of widespread efficiency measures. This session will fill this gap by introducing analysts to commonly used metrics that can capture the significant forms of inefficiency rampant in the delivery of healthcare around the world.

The session will start with a brief overview of the concept of efficiency and its importance. It will then introduce the most commonly used efficiency indicators, followed by a discussion of the limitations of these existing methods. The main focus of the session will be exploring how analysts can construct simple yet meaningful efficiency indicators in the context of the Indian healthcare delivery system.

Participants will gain practical experience in the entire process of assessing efficiency, starting from obtaining data to analyzing the data. In addition, to learning how to construct efficiency indicators, the participants will be introduced to a list of the efficiency indicators that are frequently cited in peer- reviewed and gray literature. This webinar is intended to guide analysts through the process of measuring and analyzing efficiency while acknowledging the complexities of health systems and the data-related challenges that exist in most countries.

Course Instructors and Coordinators

Dr. Winnie Yip is Professor of the Practice of Global Health Policy and Economics in the Department of Global Health and Population at the Harvard T.H. Chan School of Public Health. She serves as the Faculty Director of the school-wide China Health Partnership and recently completed her tenure as Acting Director of the Fairbank Center for Chinese Studies at Harvard University. Previously, Dr. Yip was a Professor of Health Policy and Economics at the Blavatnik School of Government, University of Oxford, and a Senior Research Fellow at Green Templeton College, Oxford, where she led the Global Health Policy Program.

Dr. Yip earned her PhD in Economics from the Massachusetts Institute of Technology. Her research primarily focuses on designing, implementing, and evaluating systemic health care interventions to improve affordable and equitable access to health care, especially for the poor. Additionally, she models and evaluates the effects of incentives on the behavior of providers and patients. Her work aims to understand why health systems fail and how they can be improved to better serve the population. Dr. Yip often employs large-scale social experiments to test health system interventions, integrating economics, organization theory, management, and political economy.

Dr. Yip's extensive research network in China covers over 25 million people in low-income provinces. Beyond China, Dr. Yip has studied and advised on health care reforms across Asia, including in Hong Kong, Taiwan, India, Thailand, Malaysia, and Vietnam. She also has significant experience in executive course for senior health policymakers and was the founding director of the Asia Network for Health System Strengthening.

In her collaborative work with governments, Dr. Yip has led interdisciplinary teams comprising experts in public health, economics, political economy, evaluation science, epidemiology, quality of care, marketing science, and management. She was the past President of the International Health Economics Association (iHEA) and has served as an adviser to numerous international agencies, including the World Bank and the World Health Organization.

Dr. Yip is also a member of the Sustainable Development Solutions Network and the National Academy of Medicine's Standing Committee on Health Systems Strengthening. She is a Senior Editor of Social Science and Medicine (Health Policy editorial office), an Associate Editor of Health Economics and Health Systems &

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Reform, and serves on the editorial boards of several other health policy publications. Her work has been funded by prestigious organizations including the National Science Foundation, the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation, the World Bank's Health Result Innovation Trust Fund (HRITF), the European Union Commission, and the Economics and Social Science Research Council.

Michael R. Reich is a political scientist whose research addresses the political dimensions of public health policy, including health system strengthening and reform, access to medicines and pharmaceutical policy, and the political economy of the policy-making process. His articles on the political economy of health policy include papers on the politics of the sugar-sweetened beverage tax in Mexico, the political economy of noncommunicable diseases, the political economy of health policy implementation, a guide to applied political economy analysis for health reform, the political economy of nutrition policy, and other topics. Dr. Reich has worked on the analysis of health systems with colleagues at Harvard for over three decades and is co-author of the landmark book on health systems, Getting Health Reform Right: A Guide to Improving Performance and Equity (by M.J. Roberts, W. Hsiao, P. Berman, and M.R. Reich, Oxford, 2004). He is founding Editor-in-Chief of the journal Health Systems & Reform, whose first issue was published in January 2015. He helped to establish the Takemi Program in International Health at Harvard in 1983, and has served as the Director of the Takemi Program since 1988. Dr. Reich has been engaged with health policy issues in Japan for five decades. On April 29, 2015, the government of Japan presented him with the award of the Order of the Rising Sun, Gold Rays with Neck Ribbon, for his outstanding contributions to the promotion of Japan's policy for global public health as well as for advancing public health in Japan. In November 2016, Dr. Reich received the Award for Lifetime Service to the Field of Health Policy and Systems Research from the Alliance for Health Policy and Systems Research and from Health Systems Global. Dr. Reich obtained his Ph.D. in Political Science at Yale University in 1981, after receiving his B.A. in Molecular Biophysics and Biochemistry and M.A. in East Asian Studies, both also at Yale.

Anuska Kalita has worked in healthcare for almost two decades in different capacities, ranging from research and policy design to grant-making and strategy. Her work is focused on undertaking practice-relevant research and translating research into policy and practice through collaborations with diverse regional and global stakeholders. Her work has spanned 12 countries across Asia, Africa, Latin

America, and Europe. Anuska is currently a Health Systems Specialist at Harvard and Director of the India Health Systems Project, an initiative leading a first-of-its-kind comprehensive health system assessment for reform design in India. She co-leads a new research and capacity-strengthening effort with the WHO (Geneva) on primary healthcare reforms. Prior to joining Harvard, she worked with the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation, The World Bank, and was a founding member of the ICICI Foundation for Inclusive Growth – a private sector philanthropic organization. Anuska has been directly involved in designing some of India's landmark health policies, most notably India's nationwide ASHA Program, one ofthe world's largest community health worker programs, and the Task Force on Primary Health to formulate the National Health Policy (2017). She serves on the Lancet Commission on Reimagining India's Health System, an initiative to offer evidence-informed reform ideas towards universal health coverage. Over the last several years at Harvard, she has focused on health systems research, capacity strengthening, and innovations to advance the goal of universal health coverage.

Maya Subramanian (she/her) is a Program and Research Assistant at the Harvard T.H. Chan School of Public Health, in the Global Health and Population department (GHP). She recently obtained her B.A. from Brandeis University, studying Health Policy and International Studies. Her research interests include health system management and quality assurance, health economics, and the efficacy of global initiatives for marginalized populations.

Professor Himanshu Negandhi is a distinguished medical doctor with a Doctorate in Public Health, specializing in Health System Strengthening with a focus on Human Resources for Health (HRH). Dr. Negandhi leads a dedicated team that collaborates with health departments across multiple states to implement District Hospital Strengthening initiatives.

With profound expertise in evaluating the supply side of HRH, he excels in conducting capacity assessments and formulating strategic interventions to address HRH shortages. His work extends to the Monitoring and Evaluation of large-scale national public health programs, ensuring their effectiveness and sustainability. Currently, Dr. Negandhi serves as a Director, playing a pivotal role in supporting and enhancing the rollout of public health educational programs across a network of public health institutions. His leadership and contributions are

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instrumental in driving improvements in health systems and building robust public health capacities.

Twinkle Shokeen is a dentist and public health professional based in Delhi, India. She earned her Master's in Public Health from the Indian Institute of Public Health, Delhi, with a specialization in Health Economics and Healthcare Financing. Her research interests include health system strengthening, health economics, and health technology assessment (HTA), with a focus on developing sustainable health policies. Currently at PHFI, she focuses on project management and knowledge management for the Institutional Health Systems Strengthening project. Previously, she served as a Technical Specialist on a USAID initiative called "Learning4impact". She applies her research, analytical, and program management skills to address complex health systems challenges. Her dedication to innovative policy solutions and strategic initiatives reflects her commitment to enhancing health outcomes and advancing the field of public health.

Course Highlights

Learn from leading experts from Harvard T.H. Chan School of Public Health.

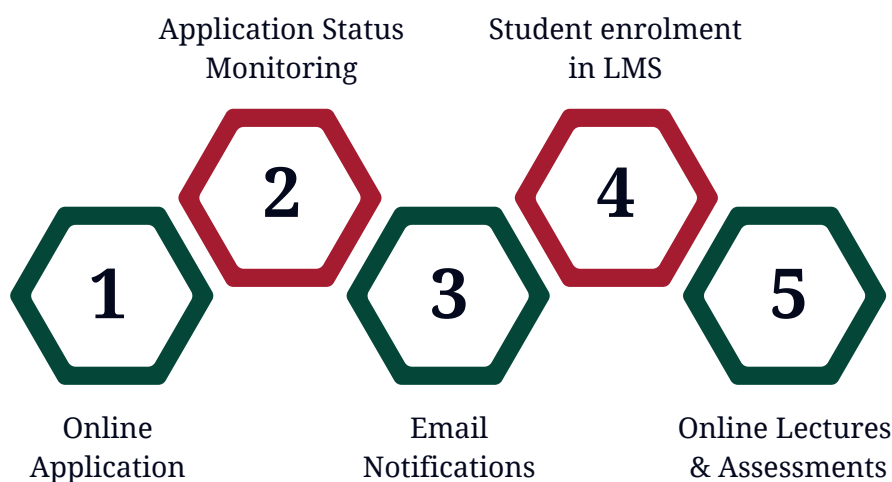Explore comprehensive approaches to health system reform.

Gain practical knowledge to assess and diagnose health system performance.

Participate in interactive and participatory webinar sessions.

To sign up for the course, complete the following steps

Details are available on our website → https://cdl.phfi.org/portal/node/359

Application Status Monitoring

Student enrolment in LMS

2   **4**

1   **3**   **5**

Online Application

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For course-related queries, please contact:

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