

Thoughts about Resilience of Health System

Health systems are built upon key functions (building blocks) that only together can ensure accessible, effective, efficient, equitable, quality health services the population need. These functions, however, may be affected seriously by a shock, such as the coronavirus epidemic/pandemic.

Resilience primarily means the capacity of a system to absorb a shock, while still retaining the fundamental functions.

The COVID-19 pandemic has shown the need to significantly support **preparedness and** increase capability to **respond** effectively to major cross border health threats.

It has in particular demonstrated the following needs:

- More coordination between functions and actors of the health care sector, more coordination and cooperation between sectors within a country, as well as more coordination and cooperation between countries during a health crisis – Minimizing the impact of a novel coronavirus outbreak in Georgia requires coordinated and careful planning of measures to control the spread of the disease, proportional public health response and provision of quality care, as well as rebuilding/strengthening the health system as necessary. The Ministry of Internally Displaced Persons from the Occupied Territories, Labour, Health and Social Affairs (MoIDPLHSA) and National Centre for Disease Control and Public Health (NCDC) need to review the current practices and protocols, and develop new models of care to manage patients and agree on novel coronavirus triage criteria as required. At all levels, planning needs to consider what is needed to protect the most vulnerable people, and address the needs of special groups (including both high risk groups, patients and health care workers, too). Regarding the legal framework, national legislation on public health and emergency response provides a legislative framework to underpin actions that may be required. New health emergency legislation may be needed to support outbreak response specific activities.
- More capacity at both national/administrative level as well as institutional/technical level to prepare for and to fight health crises – The Government needs to coordinate the allocation of available national resources required for clinical care. The MoIDPLHSA and NCDC need to assess the needs for hospital beds, medical/technical equipment, consumables, drugs as well as human resources, such as different specialists and nurses.
- More investment in health system to make sure it is ready for a similar (or even worse) shock/challenges in the future – The Government through MoIDPLHSA and NCDC needs to assess the financial needs and estimate the additional financial burden in the health care system. The Government needs to decide on financial support and subsidizes to health care financing accordingly.

Regarding the present stage of the epidemic in Georgia, when formulating and implementing the **exit strategy**:

- The Government needs to coordinate the stand down of enhanced measures; manage the transition of novel coronavirus outbreak specific processes into normal business arrangements; and undertake public communication regarding changing risk and the stand down of measures.
- The MoIDPLHSA and NCDC need to advise on the timing and impact of reducing enhanced clinical novel coronavirus outbreak services; support stand down of measures and manage the transition of novel coronavirus outbreak specific processes into business as usual arrangements; and participate in communicating public messages regarding changing risk and stand down of novel coronavirus outbreak measures.

The Government needs to develop and maintain systems to monitor communicable disease activity domestically and internationally and communicate relevant information. When a novel coronavirus pandemic has arrived in Georgia, these systems were used for monitoring and analysis. Working together with state and regional authorities, the MoIDPLHSA and NCDC need to assess the risk of a **second wave of the outbreak** to inform decision making about appropriate actions. State and regional governments need to collect surveillance data to contribute to the national public health information system and contribute to the necessary public health response.

The novel coronavirus outbreak needs to continuously be monitored, and the health system functions need to continuously be evaluated, and wherever possible response activities need to be implemented to promote robust recovery. Some regions and systems may be able to commence recovery activities sooner than others.

Preparedness in the health care system shall be the basis for the **resilience and sustainability** of the system. To build resilience within the most vulnerable populations, communications need to be used to raise awareness of at-risk groups.

The main objectives of the **Health System Resilience Strategy** in Georgia needs to be as follows¹:

- protect people from serious cross-border health threats and
- improve crisis management capacity.

The specific objectives of the Health System Resilience Strategy should be as follows:

- improve access to healthcare;
- strengthen health system and develop the capacities of health care facilities and workforce;
- make medicines, medical devices and other crisis relevant commodities available and affordable;
- invest in public health and develop capacities of public health institutions and professionals;
- raise public awareness and support population based health programmes through health promotion and disease prevention programmes.

¹ Further to the preparation and implementation of National Health Strategy that will provide overall strategy and framework for strengthening health system in Georgia.

Considering specific preparedness for future shocks due to communicable diseases, the Government of Georgia needs to consider and make plans according to the following:

- create reserves of medical supplies in case of a crisis;
- train healthcare professionals and create a pool of healthcare staff and experts that can be mobilised to prevent or respond to health crisis throughout the country or the region;
- develop surveillance system;
- improve the resilience of health systems to ensure better health outcomes for the population of Georgia.

Further to crisis preparedness and response, the Health System Resilience Strategy needs to address other important **long-term challenges** for health system:

- inequalities in health status among population groups, regions, and access to affordable health care of good quality;
- burden from non-communicable diseases and health risks and determinants;
- uneven distribution of health care systems capacity;
- digitalization, e-health and telemedicine;
- environmental health and pollution, in particular air, water and soil quality, and climate change.

The Government of Georgia needs to consider making **financial resources** available for actions designed and implemented according to these objectives. Both domestic/budgetary resources and external/donor funding could be allocated for the actions.

For instance, the following **actions** can be funded in future in the different areas:

- Training and exchange programmes for medical and healthcare staff;
- New mechanisms for procurement of goods and services necessary for the prevention and management of health crises;
- Audits of preparedness and response arrangements (such as reference laboratories, crisis management, antimicrobial resistance, vaccination) to ensure their effectiveness;
- Clinical trials to speed up the development, authorisation and access to innovative, safe and effective medicines and vaccines;
- International (e.g. cross-border or regional) collaboration and partnerships (in particular, Eastern Partnership with the European Union²);
- Deployment, operation and maintenance of digital service infrastructure;
- Analytical and research activities such as studies, data collection and benchmarking.

² The EU Health Programme has recently been published. The Programme will cover the period 2021-2027. It also takes into account the lessons learnt and gaps revealed by the novel coronavirus crisis to date, and will put in place structural changes to better prepare the EU for health challenges <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?uri=CELEX:52020PC0405>