

2024

Strengthening Primary Healthcare through the Family Health Team Approach

A Summary of EMPHNET's Roadmap



Introduction

The Eastern Mediterranean Region (EMR) grapples with multifaceted challenges in primary healthcare, from shifting demographics to the escalating prevalence of Non-Communicable Diseases (NCDs). These challenges necessitate the adoption of innovative approaches to healthcare delivery that can effectively respond to the evolving needs and expectations of populations. The imperative for reform in primary healthcare is underscored by reports and insights from various sources including WHO reports.

Objectives

The Eastern Mediterranean Public Health Network (EMPHNET) has crafted a regional roadmap aimed at modernizing and strengthening primary healthcare in the EMR through the Family Health Team (FHT) approach. Leveraging its wealth of expertise in capacity-building, technical assistance, and knowledge dissemination, EMPHNET stands poised to engage and work with stakeholders, partners, and countries' governments, fostering collaboration to effectively implement the FHT model across the countries in EMR.

Family Health Team Approach

The FHT approach presents a comprehensive population and person-centered model for primary healthcare delivery. By harnessing the expertise of multidisciplinary teams comprising physicians, nurses, dietitians, social workers, and other professionals, FHTs endeavor to offer holistic, continued, and coordinated care to individuals and families. FHTs have demonstrated numerous benefits, including improved access to care, enhanced NCDs management, a focus on prevention and health promotion, seamless care coordination, and the integration of technology-enabled services. These advantages contribute to better health outcomes, heightened patient satisfaction, and reduced healthcare costs.

The FHT approach provides a multi-faceted platform from which to address crosscutting issues, such as diet and physical activity, education, gender-based violence, child and women protection, poverty, and community development. This approach has its foundations in the modern values of Primary Health Care indicated by the World Health Organization in 2008:

- **Person-centeredness:** Health service delivery is centered on the patient/individual as a person rather than on the system and the patient/person has their needs attended to in a defined geographical location by a familiar team, rather than having to visit multiple providers in different locations for different services. As the patient/person builds a relationship with the team over the course of their life, the team is increasingly able to understand the specific context and needs of the whole person, and so to provide holistic services tailored to the individual.
- **Comprehensiveness:** The team cares for all family members, across the life cycle and the disease spectrum. This care does not only address curative aspects but focuses also on promotive and preventive health care. The team coordinates and follows the client's referral to hospitals and referral back to PHC.
- **Continuity of care:** The patient is seen by the same team at each visit to the health center and a system of family files provides a continuous record of the patient's health history. In addition to fostering the partnership between the patient and the provider, this continuity of interaction and information improves the quality of clinical care.

Alignment with UHC and National Priorities

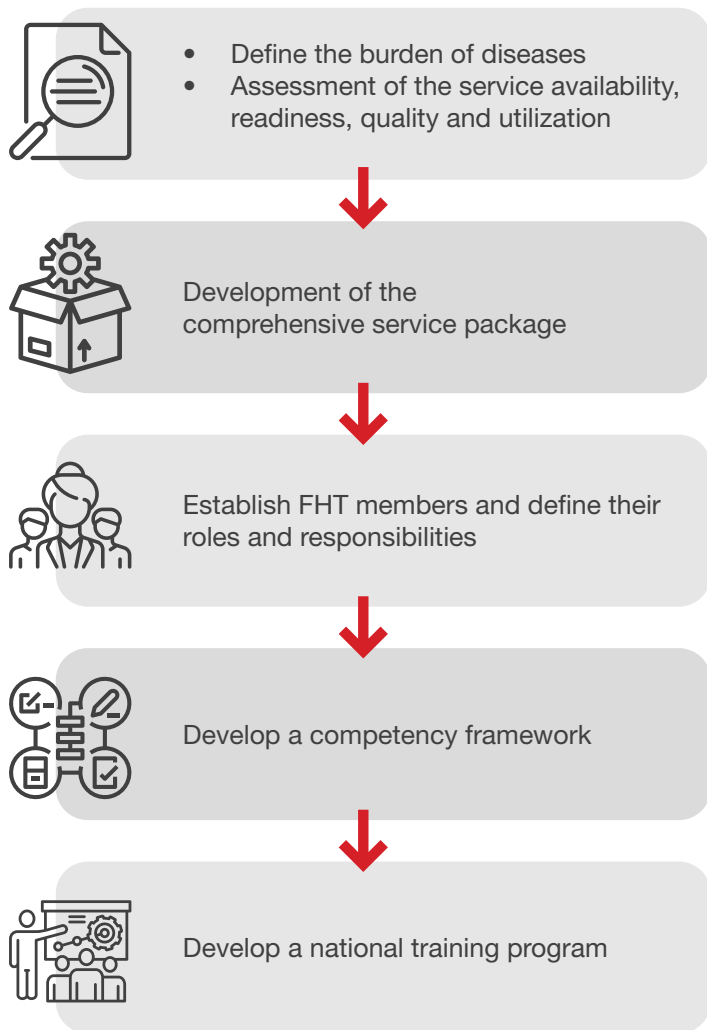
The adoption of FHTs seamlessly aligns with the objectives of achieving Universal Health Coverage (UHC) and addressing national health priorities. By amalgamating primary care services with public health initiatives, FHTs play a pivotal role in driving down overall healthcare expenditure, enhancing system performance, and ensuring equitable access for all populations, including vulnerable groups.

Actions and Processes for FHT Implementation

Implementing FHT model in healthcare requires significant organizational change, especially transitioning from traditional, physician-dependent and dichotomized care to teamwork-based healthcare. The adoption process involves factors such as policy and legal transformation, organizational structure and culture, management and leadership, and the external environment. Preparatory activities and necessary arrangements (Figure 1) include defining a comprehensive service package, establishing FHT members' roles and responsibilities, identifying needed competencies, developing a competency-based national training program, and adhering to modern PHC values. The development of the comprehensive service package should be based on the current and projected future burden of the disease and the availability, readiness, and quality of the services. Once the package is determined, the FHT members and their roles and responsibilities should be established. Once this is established, FHT competencies that are needed to deliver comprehensive services should be identified. The competency framework will then guide the development of a national training program. Once the preparatory activities and different arrangements are made, FHT will be implemented to improve access to, quality, efficiency, and utilization of comprehensive PHC services.

The implementation of FHT may encounter obstacles, including individual, organizational, institutional, and external barriers. To overcome such obstacles, several actions and processes need to be taken, including political commitment and leadership, implementing good governance and policy frameworks, allocating resources and funding, multisectoral collaboration, and engagement of communities and stakeholders. The successful implementation of FHTs requires participation from government officials, parliamentarians, civil society, and influential community, religious, and business leaders. A strategic policy framework, effective oversight, coalition building, regulation, attention to system design, and accountability are also essential.





FHT Implementation

- Leadership and governance structures
- Monitoring and evaluation of FHT Development and Implementation
- On-the-Job Training
- Appointment and Triage Systems
- Effective Referral Systems
- Health Information Systems (HIS) for FHTs
- Quality Standards and Accreditation
- Medical Equipment and Essential Medicine Lists
- Treatment Protocols
- Communication Packages
- Community engagement
- Providing Comprehensive Health Services
- Integrating NCD Services
- Integrating Public Health Services
- Supportive Supervision
- Task-Shifting
- Outreach Services
- Family Folders and Catchment Population Registration
- Patient Rostering

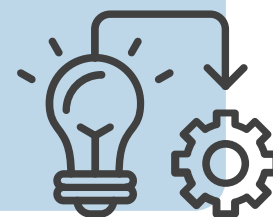


Figure 1. The preparatory activities and necessary arrangements for the FHT approach

Conclusion

The transformation of primary healthcare through the FHT approach is crucial for addressing the evolving health needs of EMR countries. By promoting collaboration and innovation, we can build resilient and responsive primary healthcare systems that prioritize the well-being of individuals and communities. Let us embark together on the journey toward fostering stronger and more inclusive primary healthcare systems in the EMR.

References

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