



Joint Learning Network for Universal Health Coverage
Strengthening Governance of the Private Sector in Mixed Health Systems during
COVID-19
Call for Expression of Interest
August 2020

Background

The Joint Learning Network for Universal Health Coverage (JLN) brings network members together for productive and high-impact practitioner-to-practitioner exchanges on a variety of health systems topics, related to implementation or improvement of universal health coverage. Recent challenges posed by the COVID-19 pandemic and in maintaining essential health services have heightened interest from countries in cross-border learning exchanges on the importance of engaging with the private sector.

COVID-19 has thrown private sector engagement into stark relief. Those countries that had strong inclusive engagement with the private sector have been able to leverage them in their COVID-19 response. Many of those that didn't are seeing predatory and corrupt behavior from the private sector that will only further erode trust between the two. Whether a help or a hindrance, COVID-19 has raised the reality of the need for a new approach to governance of mixed health systems.

The JLN members have a history of working on issues of private sector engagement. Previously, multiple countries worked together to develop knowledge products focused on understanding the private sector ([available here](#)). Currently, a JLN Learning Exchange team, facilitated by Abt Associates' SHOPS Plus program, is focused in 2020 on contracting with the private sector.

The WHO's Health Systems Governance and Financing Department (HSGF), which convenes the WHO Advisory Group on the Governance of the Private Sector for UHC (AG), is leading WHO's efforts to support countries in strengthening the governance in mixed health systems to respond to the COVID-19 pandemic. This work, supported by Impact for Health International, has involved framing the challenge, developing support, and guidance for countries based on best practice. The WHO and Impact for Health International will facilitate a learning exchange with the JLN to explore additional private sector engagement topics prioritized by countries as being critical to current COVID-19 response and recovery.

Objectives of the Learning Exchange

Over a short and intense period of 3-4 months, the WHO will build on the existing private sector engagement work within the JLN to facilitate dialogue, learning, and knowledge products on the private sector engagement *during COVID-19*.

WHO will host a scoping session to explore and prioritize the critical issues facing countries during the COVID-19 pandemic. The session will include a presentation on challenge areas and potential solutions. Additionally, we will hear from participants on in-country experience with private sector engagement in their COVID-19 responses and ask each country to identify main challenges. The input from countries will be used to inform the subsequent workstreams for the co-development of learning and knowledge products.

Several potential streams of work could come out of the above scoping session. WHO will support up to two of these streams in Q3-Q4 2020. Topics might include:

1. **Public-private dialogue:** The COVID-19 pandemic has created a most urgent need for countries to engage their whole health sector, including the private sector, in the response. The private health sector, both for-profit and non-profit, represents an important resource that countries can use either to provide a surge in capacity to respond to the pandemic or to ensure essential health services are maintained during the pandemic. A workstream in this area could focus on how to effectively engage the private and public sector in private-public dialogue by focusing on 6 key behaviours: building understanding, fostering relations, enabling stakeholders, aligning structures, nurturing trust, and delivering strategy.
2. **Contracting with the private sector:** Countries that have not contracted with the private sector widely may be interested in the potential of this mechanism to address COVID-19 related acute health care needs. A workstream in this area could examine how countries can increase public and private capacity for contracting, and identify best practices for designing, implementing, monitoring and evaluating contracts. This could focus on the utilization of contracting to expand country capacity for COVID-19 testing, treatment and supplies¹. Collaboration between countries on this topic will allow for a deeper understanding of how contracting can be utilized in the COVID-19 response.²
3. **Data and accountability:** Understanding public-private distribution in a country is foundational for understanding a mixed health system but finding quick and accessible ways to understand private sector assets to leverage in the COVID-19 response is critical. Finding ways to collect and use these data to build accountability and trust for the future can catalyse a new approach to governance. The potential is there, the question is how. Data on the private sector exists, but countries need an easy and accessible way to access and use it. A workstream in this area could identify how countries can quickly collect and utilize data from the private sector to support their response to COVID-19, and to do so in a way that builds a foundation for strengthened governance.

¹ WHO has prepared best practice support materials and is drafting country guidance on topics such as COVID-19 testing, screening and supplies that might be leveraged.

² WHO, IFC and GFF have drafted country guidance on this topic that may be useful for the facilitation of discussion.

4. ***Ensuring the financial sustainability of the private health sector:*** The [financial sustainability](#) of the private health sector during COVID-19 has become a real focal point for countries, not only because of the need to integrate efforts between the public and private sectors during the pandemic but also because of the importance of the private sector in providing health services for large segments of the population. A workstream in this area could explore the financial measures countries are using to support the private healthcare sector; the risks associated with such investment; and the options countries might use to build a better working relationship between the sectors in order to strengthen the response to the pandemic and advance UHC. A workstream in this area could focus on demand side financing approaches, expansion of health coverage and range of health services, reorientation and timing of financial resources, quality requirements, and approaches to avoid corruption and market distortion.

Expected Outcomes

Based on the discussions and work in the workstreams, WHO aims to work with countries to develop at least one knowledge product per workstream. This knowledge product will become part of the normative standards used by WHO during the COVID-19 support and beyond. They will be posted on the [Health Systems Governance Collaborative](#) and the JLN [website](#) as a first step.

Level of effort, duration and expected contributions

Participants will be expected to:

1. Attend and actively participate in all the virtual meetings (scoping and subsequent workstream)
2. Participate in discussions via discussion board and online polling
3. Engage with, and be responsive to, the technical facilitator(s) via email, MyJLN, Whatsapp groups and other social media platforms previously discussed with the technical facilitator
4. Contribute to the development of synthesis briefs.

Participants

Each country joining this effort should nominate a team of 2 or 3 individuals to participate. This conversation will benefit from engaging those closest to work in governance of mixed health systems. We're particularly interested in perspectives from:

- Ministry of Health (i.e. officers responsible for curative services, human resources, policy planning and financing, public-private partnership technical working groups, division of legislation and regulation)
- National Health Insurance representatives (contracting facilities, empanelment)
- Ministry of Finance (i.e. budget officer for health, economic planning and development, public-private partnership technical working groups)
- The private health service delivery sector (i.e. representatives from federations, hospital groups, clinic groups, professional associations (doctors, nurses, pharmacies), laboratory groups)



How to Submit an Expression of Interest

To kick off these activities, the technical facilitation team welcomes JLN and non-JLN countries to submit an Expression of Interest. Please submit your response [in this link](#) and answer a short questionnaire, providing details about yourself and telling us about:

1. Your experience, if any, with private sector engagement.
2. Your experience, if any, with the COVID-19 pandemic response (private sector engagement or otherwise).

Please respond with your Expression of Interest by **Sep 10**.

If you have any further questions, please email the Joint Learning Network at jln@msh.org