



Egypt's Efforts to Uphold the Right to Health (Celebrating International Health Day, April 7 2020)

International Health Day (7 April) coincides with the day of the entry into force of the World Health Organization (WHO) Constitution in 1948. This year it falls at a very critical juncture given the current global health crisis, and the unprecedented global challenge of the COVID-19 outbreak. Never before has Egypt faced this grave threat to the right to life, and the right to health and physical integrity. It does so within the parameters comprehensively provided, first by its COVID-19 strategy, second, relying on the framework and provisions of Egypt's Constitution, and, third, mapping the future by advocating the "Right to Health" within Egypt Vision 2033. Together, these three pillars ensure that Egypt's Health sector is, and will continue to be resilient, flexible and tough in safeguarding the birthright of every Egyptian citizen to wellbeing and healthiness.

- The authorities have preemptively taken a number of ongoing precautionary and preventive measures within a comprehensive plan, in order to limit the COVID 19 Pandemic from spreading nationally and to efficiently respond to positive cases.
- Daily and transparent statistical updates announced by the Egyptian government on the numbers of positive, cured and mortality cases reflect the determination of all state agencies to control the spread of the virus and deal unambiguously with the health, economic and social repercussions of the current crisis.
- A "Supreme Committee" is responsible for managing the COVID-19 crisis. Its multiple efforts have earned the praise of the WHO, its technical mission in Egypt announcing that the country has made tremendous efforts to control the virus, in its early detection, testing, isolation, quarantine, tracking of contacts and referral of positive cases. On 3 April 2020, WHO Director-General Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus thanked Egypt's President Abdel Fattah El-Sisi for his compelling and effective commitment to curb the spread of COVID-19. Ghebreyesus tweeted "Thank you, President El Sisi for your commitment to stop the coronavirus from spreading and also ensuring that affected populations are receiving wide-ranging support. A great act of leadership and solidarity."
- The Technical Secretariat of the Supreme Standing Committee of Human Rights has developed on the occasion of International Health Day a report on Egypt's efforts to uphold the right to health at the level of national legislation, policies and indicators. It has previously issued a detailed and specialized description on national efforts to uphold human rights in its response to COVID-19.

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First: The Constitutional and Legal Frameworks



- The Constitution firmly upholds health and relevant rights. It initially provides for the right of every single citizen to health in Article 18 which details the citizen's right to integrated health care in compliance with quality standards. The State, by virtue of the same article, ensures preservation, support and capacity building of public health service facilities providing services to the people whilst ensuring their geographical distribution. The State, also, allocates a percentage of no less than 3% of GDP for health, to be increased progressively. The Constitution censures abstention from the provision of treatment to every human being in emergencies or life-threatening cases.
- According to Article 18 the State covers a host of other matters, including improving the financial situation of physicians, nurses, and paramedics as they are at the front line of defense against disease. This is particularly relevant at times of crisis (such as the present viral pandemic) All health facilities, products and materials are subject to State control as well as health related media. The Constitution nevertheless deals with a host of related issues pertaining to the health of each citizen, including health rights for children including compulsory free immunization, health care and staple nutrition (Article 80). It also prohibits medical or scientific experiments on humans without their free documented consent (Article 60).
- As for the legal framework, Egypt has made remarkable strides by promulgating the comprehensive Health Insurance Law (Law 2/2018) which covers mandatory insurance of all citizens residing in the country, with the option of extending the same to cover Egyptian expatriates. The law obligates the State to provide services such as public health, preventive services, first aid and ambulance services, family planning and other health services necessary to cover all kinds of disasters and epidemics for free as well as occupational injuries. The law will be gradually applied to all governorates to ensure fiscal sustainability and actuarial balance. The State will boost the efficiency of state-owned health facilities gradually before rolling out the system.
- The philosophy of the new comprehensive Health Insurance system resides in the principle of mandatory coverage and social solidarity whereby the state covers the costs for the less-privileged. The system is based on the separation of finance from service provision. The General Authority for Comprehensive Health Insurance is in charge of the system management and finance, whereas the Authority of Health Care provides health and curative care services within and without hospitals.
- The comprehensive Health Insurance Law will be applied in six phases until 2023. The first phase was launched by President Abdul Fattah Al-Sisi in November 2019 as a step to lay the foundations for an integrated health system covering 100% of Egyptians as per the latest international criteria. The number of beneficiaries of the first phase to date has reached 2,700,000.

Second: An Egypt Health Vision for 2030

Health policy national ambitions acquire special significance in the process of strategic planning as expressed in Egypt Vision 2030. This provides a blueprint for a number of targets and goals in relation to upholding the right to health in the future:

1. Achieving better, fairer and more equitable health results to boost welfare and economic development.
2. Achieving comprehensive health coverage for all Egyptians to secure their needs of safe quality health services as and when needed lessen the financial burden.
3. Increasing investment in health while guaranteeing the optimization of available resources.
4. Developing and bolstering public health programmes that enhance and protect health.
5. Ensuring quality and safety of health services.
6. Improving the health sector governance to guarantee its effective, responsible and transparent management at all levels.

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Egypt Vision 2030 provides for a number of key performance indicators including: extension of life expectancy until seventy nine years of age; reduction of infant and under-5 mortality rates by 50%; reduction of maternity mortality rate by 60%; ending all forms of malnutrition; reduction of the financial burden emanating from out-of-pocket expenditure by 24%; satisfaction of the fair and equitable accessibility by all citizens to necessary health interventions to 80%; ensuring the availability of basic medicines, and medical equipment; and boosting governmental spending on health to 5% of GDP. Third: The Institutional Structure to Enhance Respect and Protection of Human Rights

Third: Pillars of Support Upholding the Right to Health

Public Spending on Health

The State Budget for the Fiscal Year 2019/2020 shows that health expenditures total EGP 73,062 billion with an increase of EGP 11 billion compared to the last fiscal year. Health spending covers hospitals and outpatient clinics, specialized hospital services, medical centres services, maternity centres, public health services, research and development in health affairs, public hospitals, university hospitals, the General Authority for Hospitals and Educational Institutes, the Pharmaceutical Control and Research Authority, the Ophthalmology Research Institute and the National Council for Addiction Control.

Treatment at the State Expense

Public spending on treating less-privileged citizens at the expense of the State reached EGP 6,622 million compared to EGP5,637 million as per the balance sheet of 2019 with an increase of

EGP985 million. The foregoing figures show that the State has doubled its expenses compared to five years ago.

Allocations for purchasing medicine and medical equipment made during fiscal year 2019/2020 reached EGP 9,113 million, representing 12% of the budget for the purchase of goods and services. Subsidization of children's medicine and milk allocations amount to EGP 1,500 million. This subsidization is the amount of cost difference borne by the state resulting from the importation and sale of insulin, children's milk and potassium iodides for prices less than the economic cost.

Health Insurance Subsidy

An amount of EGP 2,092,000,000 is earmarked for health insurance programmes for the various categories as per the Financial Statement of the State Budget for the Fiscal Year 2019/2020. The subsidy amount is to be distributed over six programmes as follows:

1. Health insurance subsidy for students in the amount of EGP 351,000,000 allocated in the budget for 23,400,000 students, in the annual amount of EGP15 per student.
2. Health insurance subsidy for single mothers in the amount of EGP 166,000,000 for 830,000 single mothers, in the amount of EGP 200 per single mother.
3. Health insurance subsidy for children below school age in the amount of EGP 227,000,000 covering 15,170,000 children, in the amount of EGP 15 annually per child.
4. Health insurance subsidy for less-privileged citizens (comprehensive Health Insurance system) in the amount of EGP 252,000,000.
5. Health insurance subsidy for less-privileged beneficiaries of social insurance pension in the amount of one billion Egyptian pounds.
6. Health insurance subsidy for farmers in the amount of EGP 100,000,000 covering 500,000 individuals in the amount of EGP 200 annually per capita.

National Health Indicators

Number of State-owned Hospitals:

- The number of state-owned hospitals increased from 643 in 2011 to 691 in 2018. Meanwhile the number of private hospitals increased from 926 in 2011 to 1157 in 2018. This increase is nationwide to ensure access by all citizens to health care. The number of insured citizens increased from 50,194,000 in 2014 to 55,581,000 in 2018.

Number of Patients Treated at State Expense:

- The number of patients treated at State expense domestically and abroad increased to 2,632,000 in 2018 with a cost of EGP 8.4 billion. Certain measures are taken to ensure speedy curative service provision at State expense thus shrinking the period lapsing between application and decision issuance to 48 hours in cases of emergency and 72 hours for other cases.

Number of Auxiliary Service:

- The number of ambulances increased in 2018 to 2912 and the number of emergency centers increased to 1464. The number of university hospitals increased by 2.3% in 2018 compared to 2017 by 89 hospitals. Physicians numbers increased in 2018 to become 126,197, whereas the number of nurses reached 217,105. Blood transfusion services are developed to reach 24 centres in all governorates. The foregoing assets and resources are deployed nationwide to ensure inclusive service provision covering, inter alia, rural and urban areas, males and females, and low-income brackets.

Mandatory Routine Vaccination and Tests:

- 2.6 million children receive mandatory routine vaccines annually with coverage exceeding 96%. Egypt has managed to eradicate certain diseases and the WHO announced it had completely eradicating polio with no new cases since 2003. 40 million vaccinations are administered annually against polio, rubella and mumps. A program was developed to support natural breast feeding during the first six months to ensure safe nutrition for infants. A mandatory test is run for would-be spouses to ensure the absence of any disease. Would-be spouse test offices totaled 481 nationwide in 2018.

Reduction in Under-5 Mortality Rate:

- Intensive governmental efforts has led to a decrease in child mortality rate under age 5 from 42.1 thousand in 2015 to 36.7 thousand in 2018. The number of under 5 mortalities decreased from 20.3 thousand in 2015 to 20 thousand in 2018. Universal mortality rate fell from 8.6% in 2006 to 3.2% in 2018.

Health Education:

- Within the context of health awareness and education, outreach initiatives are developed to educate people on pregnancy and follow-up with specialized doctors. Eventually, the number of births supervised by skilled specialists increased from 80.7% in 2007 to 92.7% in 2011. A health education campaign was launched targeting medical cadres, local leaders, and the populace especially in areas with high rates of endemic diseases. The civil society is active in the area of health outreach. The number of notarized NGOs in 2019 reached 211 in Greater Cairo.
- National Campaign for the Eradication of Hepatitis C Virus
- In September 2018 President Al-Sisi launched an initiative to eradicate Hepatitis C and early detection of non-communicable diseases under the slogan "100 Million Health Initiative". Under this initiative all state sectors, spearheaded by the Ministry of Health



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and Population, provide full support to that initiative. The initiative was administered on three successive phases nationwide for seven months starting October 2018 until end of April 2019 in all twenty seven governorates. 56 million citizens were tested in this context, detecting 2,200,000 positive cases. Hepatitis C treatment was disbursed to 900,000 citizens. The total cost of the initiative reached USD 260,000,000, 130,000,000 treatments and 130,000,000 tests. The WHO, and its representative in Egypt, have repeatedly commended the efforts of the Egyptian State in addressing Hepatitis C thanks to political commitment at the highest level in the State to control the disease.

Screening and Treating Refugees and Foreigners

- In the context of the 100 Million Health Initiative in 2019) a new phase screens and treats foreigners and refugees from Hepatitis C. This presidential initiative targets screening children arrivals up till 18 years of age and adults over 18 years old. Screening is administered in 309 screening points nationwide. 67,498 refugees and foreign residents have been examined and positive cases were treated gratuitously. The first refugee who tested positive for hepatitis C received free treatment one week after test commencement. Almost 182 positive cases received free treatment after the first incident.
- In this context, the UN High Commission for Refugees and the WHO both commended the new phase of the 100 Million Health Initiative covering all foreign residents in Egypt.

Women and Students:

- Under the “Egyptian Women are the Health of Egypt” initiative for early detection of breast cancer, 115,000 women were tested until July 2019. The initiative targets 30 million women. A 100 Million Health Initiative for early detection of anemia, stunting, obesity and malnutrition of school students targets 11.5 million students in 22,000 schools.

Control of Harmful Traditional Practices (including FGM):

- The National Committee Against FGM was established in 2019 and is co-headed by the National Council for Women and the National Council for Motherhood and Childhood to synergize efforts to eradicate FGM. The State has, in collaboration with civil society, launched several initiatives including “White Coat” and “Let’s Protect Her” to educate on the gravity of FGM and its health adverse effects. Law 78/2016 was enacted to amend the Penal Code whereby FGM is considered a felony In the case where the FGM process is completed and causes the death or permanent disability of the victim penalty would be aggravated. The National Strategy Against FGM (2016-2020) aims to decrease FGM rates by enforcing relevant laws and ministerial decisions. The strategy also aims to



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educate society on the risks involved in FGM and that FGM is religiously groundless, in addition to tightening control and aggravating the penalty for doctors who engage in FGM.

Control of Drugs:

- A Fund has been created for the treatment and control of addiction and drug-use pursuant to Presidential Decree 46/1991. The Fund has several initiatives for education on the risks of substance abuse and the social integration of cured cases. For example “Life is Rosier Without Smoking” educates children on the adverse effects of smoking as well as the “Egypt Free of Addiction” Initiative to help addicts get rid of substance abuse impact. as well as “Listen to Me” Initiative raises awareness about the harmful effects of smoking and substance-use and rectifies misconceptions about substance abuse.
- In this context awareness raising programmes for students have been applied on the dangers of substance abuse to 8500 schools targeting 1.5 million students with a 50% increase compared to 2019. Sixty six youth training camps are provided for students targeting 2500 volunteer activists against drug use. Outreach is developed for factory workers under the slogan “Make No Mistake” targeting 7500 workers. Moreover, 200 awareness initiatives have been organized for truck and heavy duty drivers under the slogan “Have a Safe Trip” in 22 governorates for 20,000 drivers, whereby it becomes obligatory for drivers to take the drug tests as a sine-qua-non for license issuance and renewal. Thirty four workshops held at corrective institutions and 60 preventive theatre shows perform in most vulnerable locations, main squares and arenas. The Friday Sermon has been standardized in coordination with the Ministry of Awqaf to educate people on the dangers of drugs in addition to the information campaign “You Are Stronger than Drugs” which reached 40,000,000 views in two months.