

The Global Health Workforce Crisis



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Health systems can only operate with a health workforce. Achieving universal health coverage, with priority given to vulnerable groups, depends on the availability, accessibility, acceptability and quality of health workers."

*A Universal Truth: No Health Without a Workforce
–[Global Health Workforce Alliance](#) & WHO, 2013*

The delivery of health care services in any country depends on the presence of health care professionals. There is a global shortage of health care providers – a shortage that disproportionately affects low- and middle-income countries. These countries have limited resources, both human and financial, and face a significant burden of disease.

Therefore, while resource-scarce countries have enormous needs in the health care sector, they have little ability to educate and support the workforce necessary to address these needs.

Because of these limited resources, not enough health care professionals receive training, few have the opportunity for continued professional education and growth, and most work in isolation with little opportunity to learn from nearby colleagues.

The impact of this shortage on the delivery of health care is evident. Clinics have long lines and must turn patients away when staff is unavailable to see them. Patients often present long after an accident, seeking care for problems made worse by the delay. Parents may not bring children to a clinic for care because they cannot afford the trip or the loss of income that comes from being away from home. Patients in need of surgery languish in wards due to lack of operating personnel – the surgeon may be available but there is no one to provide anesthesia.

The past three decades have seen a major shift in health care needs in resource-scarce countries. While malaria, tuberculosis and other infectious diseases remain important contributors to the disease burden found in low- and middle-income countries, **these countries now also face the full array of chronic and noncommunicable diseases**, including diabetes, heart disease and cancer that has previously only been associated with more developed countries. Here are a few key statistics that motivate HVO and our volunteers:

- **400 million people** globally lack access to one or more essential health services. (Source: [Universal Health Coverage](#), World Health Organization)
- **Five billion people do not have access** to safe, affordable surgical and anesthesia care when needed.
 - Access is worst in low-income and lower-middle-income countries, where nine of ten people cannot

access basic surgical care. (Source: [Global Surgery 2030: evidence and solutions for achieving health, welfare, and economic development](#), The Lancet Commission on Global Surgery)

- There is a **global shortage of more the 7.2 million health workers** – a figure that will grow to 12.9 million by the year 2035.
 - 83 countries (44.6%) do not currently meet the 2006 World Health Report threshold of 22.8 skilled health professionals per 10 000 population (Source: [A Universal Truth: no health without a workforce](#), The Global Health Workforce Alliance)

Health Volunteers Overseas aims to address the crisis through long-term impact, maximizing the number of patients that receive quality care by teaching and training the providers who will be there to serve them day-in and day-out.