

Strategies of Improvement of Access to Quality Primary Healthcare in the United Arab Emirates: Lessons to Learn

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ABSTRACT

Introduction: This research topic explores the current state of access to quality primary healthcare in the United Arab Emirates (UAE). It examines the challenges that limit access to quality primary healthcare, such as inadequate infrastructure, limited resources, and a lack of public awareness. It proposes strategies to improve access to quality primary healthcare in the UAE, such as increasing public awareness campaigns, improving infrastructure and resources, and introducing new policies and regulations. It also recommends creating cutting-edge healthcare delivery strategies, such as telemedicine and mobile health technologies. The absence of evidence-based research that concentrates on the efficacy of certain interventions is a problem in the UAE when it comes to developing and improving access to high-quality primary healthcare.

Methods: The study employs a qualitative approach to enhance access to quality primary healthcare in the UAE. It employs a descriptive survey for secondary data collection, incorporating and various sources such as reports and online documents.

Results: The Health Authority Abu Dhabi has undertaken a research study to evaluate the relationship between regulatory approaches and adherence to regulatory requirements, which will improve healthcare quality.

Conclusion: Research on primary healthcare accessibility in the UAE highlights areas for improvement like addressing service gaps and refining care methods. Current shortcomings involve infrastructure and financial constraints, requiring more investment and collaboration. It emphasizes approaches like raising awareness and providing incentives. Involving stakeholders helps ensure access to high-quality healthcare by evidence-based policy recommendations.

Keywords: health workers; healthcare challenges; healthcare strategies; primary care services; healthiness.

INTRODUCTION

The World Health Organization seeks to increase health fairness, lower health risks, encourage healthy environments and behaviours, and address the root causes of health problems ¹, because of this, one of the healthcare professions' social obligations is to identify discrepancies in the delivery of healthcare and seek to promote health equity. Recent changes in the health system have shown the need for improvements and developments in the healthcare system, even taking into consideration and distributing countries' income. One of the major obstacles preventing. The absence of primary healthcare integration prevents programs in low- and middle-income nations from being successful. Many low- and middle-income nations were afraid that perhaps the MDGs (Millennium Development Goals) will not be fulfilled until 2015, despite a number of advancements ².

In 1971, the United Arab Emirates (UAE) was created by the seven emirates of Abu Dhabi, Dubai, Ajman, Umm Al Quwain, Sharjah, Fujairah, and Ras Al Khaimah (UAE). His Royal Highness will be 50 years old when the UAE is founded in 2021. President and Deputy Prime Minister of the UAE, Sheikh Mohammed bin Rashid Al Maktoum, unveiled an ambitious plan with the overarching objective of making the UAE one of the best nations in the world ³.

The UAE is a developing country with significant economic reserves. As the capital and seat of government, with approximately 87% of the country's population, Abu Dhabi is the largest emirate in both size and population. The Central Capital Region of Abu Dhabi, Abu Dhabi is divided into three regions: The Eastern Al Ain Region, the Western Al Gharbia Region, and the Western Al Gharbia Region ⁴. The enhancement of its citizens' health and the effectiveness of its healthcare system is one of the seven pillars of the UAE's national policy. Key performance indicators (KPIs) include structural and organizational goals like the law requiring independent certification of all healthcare facilities, as well as public health objectives like increasing life expectancy and reducing tobacco use ³.

The Emirates Health Authorities and the Ministry of Health, which regulate the public health field, which are in charge of state-level service delivery, are the two organizations that oversee the health sector in the United Arab Emirates (UAE) (in Dubai and Abu Dhabi). All nationals have access to health care, and non-nationals are required to get health insurance ⁵. Access to healthcare encompasses more than just the availability of service; it also considers high costs, inequalities in access, and standard satisfaction levels. The second aspect of healthcare delivery in the UAE would be accessibility to care ⁶.

The goal of universal health coverage (UHC) is to give everyone access to basic healthcare services while removing financial barriers and poverty brought on by medical bills. The path to UHC requires universal access to high-quality preventive, curative, and rehabilitation services as well as universal involvement in a financial protection system. By preventing health-related financial shocks that might cause families to fall into poverty, universal health coverage can help ⁷. The UAE's 2021 vision pledges, in order to meet residents' rising aspirations and expectations, the government must provide universal access to health care services for all Emiratis through the availability and equal accessibility of high-quality health care services and personal care services. By improving healthcare governance and achieving hospital and healthcare certification, the UAE Government is committed to offering highest healthcare services ⁵.

However, there is still a need to develop and increase access to high-quality primary care in the UAE. This research paper will investigate the current condition of primary healthcare in the UAE and propose ways for increasing access to high-quality basic healthcare services. It will also discuss the challenges that exist in providing access to quality primary healthcare services as well as potential solutions for overcoming these challenges. It will also propose strategies for developing and improving access to quality primary healthcare in the country, as well as how these strategies can be implemented in a cost-effective manner while ensuring that all individuals have access to quality care. Finally, it will make recommendations on how the UAE may enhance and increase access to high-quality primary care.

The Ministry of Health and Prevention in the UAE is creating a comprehensive system that will streamline the participation of all organizations that provide healthcare services and direct such input to make healthcare quality, access, and affordability the triple ⁶. Over the last decade, the United Arab Emirates (UAE) has made great progress in enhancing access to high-quality primary healthcare. The government has implemented a variety of initiatives to ensure that all inhabitants and citizens have access to high-quality healthcare services. Understanding the current condition of primary healthcare in the UAE and devising measures to enhance access and quality require research. This research should concentrate on identifying gaps in service delivery, evaluating the impact of current policies, and investigating creative alternatives that might be applied to increase access and quality.

Because the UAE healthcare system is not centralized, money comes from both the public and private sectors, resulting in a diversity of payment options, insurance coverage, and services available. However, regardless of the country, there are three qualities that are thought vital to examine when contemplating healthcare delivery: First, there is no central controlling agency, and there is minimal integration and coordination; second, there is a high cost, unequal access, and an average output; and third, there is a drive for quality, integration, and accountability. Dr. William Kissick coined the term "Iron Triangle" or "Triad of Healthcare" to refer to these three constituents: expense, access, and quality. This describes the relationship between these aspects in terms of institutional policymaking, healthcare, and business ⁶.

The vision of the UAE is to assure everyone's happiness, peaceful coexistence, social fairness, and dignity both within the country and in the world ⁸. One of the key principles of the UAE's national policy is improving the health of its population and the efficiency of its healthcare system ³. However, there is an imbalanced mix of UAE citizens and foreigners, both in terms of age and geographic location. Only 19.0 percent of Abu Dhabi's population are nationals of the UAE. Medical services should be community-based in order to provide continuous and coordinated care that satisfies the health needs of the population. The distribution and delivery of them are influenced by demographic factors ⁴.

The UAE's healthcare sector is governed by the federal Ministry of Health and Prevention (MOHAP). The Dubai Health Authority and the Ministry of Health and Prevention (MOHAP) are in charge of regulating, licensing, funding, and managing facilities (DHA). Due to private sector investments in health services, Dubai's healthcare infrastructure has grown significantly as a result of the city's rapid domestic market expansion and growing regional medical tourism center status ⁹.

To improve the quality of medical care and health outcomes for its residents, the government of the UAE aspires to build a world-class medical system. To that goal, it has significantly changed health care during the past ten years ⁶. The UAE has adopted a number of novel measures to promote access to high-quality primary care. These include establishing a national health insurance plan, establishing a national electronic health record system, developing telemedicine services, and utilizing mobile health technologies. Furthermore, the UAE has invested in developing rural healthcare infrastructure and services, as well as incentivizing healthcare providers to practice in underserved areas.

Numerous comparative reviews have been conducted by international organizations such as the World Health Organization (WHO) and the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD), but the findings remain inconclusive because healthcare costs continue to rise, disparities persist, and health outcomes have not significantly improved ¹⁰.

Although Abu Dhabi's healthcare infrastructure is rather well-established, with private clinics managing the mass of non-critical patients, progress has been uneven, and there are significant capacity gaps, particularly in intensive care and both adult and paediatric subspecialties. However, HAAD has implemented a capacity master plan, which has led to modest increases in the population's access to hospital beds as well as the number of specialized specialists. The tight boundaries between services, as well as the fact that patients require frequent transfers across providers, create another gap in the coordination and integration of services across different areas of specialization ¹¹.

The UAE government has taken a number of initiatives to increase access to high-quality primary healthcare. These are some instances:

1. Establishing a national health insurance system: The UAE government has established a national health insurance system that provides basic medical care to all citizens and residents. This system provides financial security to those in greatest need while also ensuring that everyone has access to high-quality healthcare services ³.

2. Improving regulations and standards for healthcare providers: To ensure that healthcare providers provide high-quality care, the UAE government has implemented new regulations and standards. These include accreditation, licensing, and training requirements for healthcare practitioners¹².
3. Increasing access to public health services: The UAE government is increasing access to public health services for all citizens and residents. This involves expanding the number of primary-care clinics, boosting access to preventive care services like immunizations, and offering more specialty treatment options like mental health services³.
4. Technology investment: The UAE government is investing in technology to expand access to high-quality basic healthcare services. Investing in telemedicine platforms that allow patients to contact doctors remotely, as well as building electronic medical records systems that can help streamline patient care operations, are examples of how this might be done¹³.

The effects of health care reforms were only investigated in three of the studies. Even while many experts have argued that it is too early to determine whether the UAE health system reforms implemented over the last ten years have had the desired effects, there is evidence of a good trend³. For that reason, the absence of evidence-based studies focusing on the effectiveness of specific interventions creates a gap in research on how to develop and improve access to quality primary healthcare in the UAE.

More study is needed to assess the impact of various methods, such as health system changes, health finance systems, and public-private partnerships, on enhancing access to high-quality primary care in the UAE. Furthermore, there is a need for cost-effectiveness studies on various therapies as well as their scalability potential. Finally, further research is required to determine how cultural and social factors influence access to high-quality primary care in the UAE.

According to all data collected above and information, the gap in UAE's Health System can resolve through:

- a. Raise public knowledge of the importance of primary healthcare: The government should fund educational initiatives to inform the populace about the importance of primary healthcare and how it may improve their quality of life. This could include TV and radio commercials, posters, and other types of media.
 - b. Increase access to primary healthcare services: The government should collaborate with local health authorities to ensure that all citizens have access to high-quality primary care. This may include extending current facilities or constructing new ones in underserved areas, as well as providing transit choices for individuals who are unable to easily access existing facilities.
 - c. Enhance financing for primary care: The government should increase financing for primary care services to ensure that they are appropriately staffed and equipped with the resources needed to provide quality care. This could involve providing additional staff training, investing in new technology, and raising compensation for field-based medical practitioners.
 - d. Strengthen public-private partnerships: The government should collaborate with private-sector institutions, including hospitals, clinics, and pharmacies, to deepen their partnerships and guarantee that they are providing quality treatment at an affordable cost. This could include rewarding private-sector groups that fulfil specific standards of care or providing subsidies to individuals who cannot afford the entire cost of treatment.
- Engage in research: The UAE should invest in primary healthcare research in order to discover areas for improvement and develop ways of providing better treatment to patients.
- e. Improve infrastructure: The UAE should invest in enhancing the infrastructure of existing primary healthcare facilities, such as better equipment and technology, as well as greater staff training. This will aid in ensuring that patients receive the best care available.

METHODS

Research design: This was a systematic review using a qualitative approach conducted to enhance knowledge about Abu Dhabi's primary healthcare services and assess the level of medical care to improve and progress the system. A comprehensive literature review using PRISMA protocol attempts to collect all empirical data that fits pre-specified eligibility criteria in order to address a given research problem. This study adheres to the Cochrane Collaboration's systematic review principles and focuses on the specific research question: "Is the quality of health services in the UAE adequate?" and "What are the difficulties and opportunities for improvement?" Where are the gaps if they aren't there?

Research location: United Arab Emirates

Information sources: This review relied on secondary data sources that were freely available and in the public domain. The search was restricted to English-language publications. Only recently published publications and data were reviewed. (after 2015). The data collection takes 4 months to collect and review.

Data analysis: Thematic analysis proves to be a suitable qualitative method for this study, as it allows flexibility and extensive application in exploring patterns, themes, and meanings within qualitative data. The process involves several essential steps: first, researchers become familiar with the data by reading and gathering qualitative data from focus groups, interviews, or relevant sources, and defining criteria for inclusion and exclusion while taking notes for a basic understanding. Next, data coding assigns codes to segments that indicate intriguing theories or notions related to the study.

Generating initial themes follows, where potential themes are formed by grouping similar concepts from the codes, identifying patterns, and assessing potential significance. Then, researchers review and refine the themes to ensure the coded data adequately supports each theme and aligns with the research topic. Themes are then defined and named descriptively to convey the essence of the subject matter. Finally, in the report writing phase, researchers organize the information into a coherent narrative that addresses the research question, incorporates relevant quotations and examples for context.

Search criteria: The following medical subject headings were included in United Arab Emirates, Abu Dhabi, Health System, and Key Health Care were the primary searches on Google Scholar and PubMed. Some of the articles' references were also checked, and a manual search of all of the UAE's official health websites was done; Department of Health.

Ethical clearance: Assuring data confidentiality was essential, necessitating the safeguarding of information and prevention of unauthorized data sharing, involving secure storage. Lastly, there is no any potential conflicts of interest that could have influenced the research, such as financial or personal relationships.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

Over the last ten years, the government of the United Arab Emirates (UAE) has introduced far-reaching changes to its healthcare system, aiming to establish a top-tier medical infrastructure. These reforms were undertaken with the goal of enhancing healthcare quality and the overall health of its citizens¹⁴. Nevertheless, even with these endeavours, the UAE encounters various public health obstacles, encompassing diseases not spread by infection, mental health disorders, and limited health-related knowledge^{15,16}. Previous research and studies have shown that the UAE has made a conscious effort to ensure access to high-quality primary healthcare services. According to the World Health Organization, the UAE has attained universal health coverage for its citizens and residents, with a concentration on primary care services⁵. A national health insurance system has been established, public hospitals and clinics have been expanded, and the UAE government has implemented a number of initiatives to improve access to high-quality primary healthcare services. Among these initiatives is the requirement that all residents and citizens of the country have health insurance¹⁷.

Table 1. Classification of healthcare facilities in the UAE based on category (government and private) during the period from 2005 to 2014.

	2005	2010	2014
Government*			
Hospitals	26	34	36
Beds	4273	7029	7493
Physicians	2105	5031	6504
Nurses	6132	10.875	16.547
Private			
Hospitals	37	58	79
Beds	1546	2556	4164
Physicians	1143	7866	10.165
Nurses	1866	10.611	16.882
Total			
Hospitals	63	92	115
Beds	5819	9585	11.657
Physicians	3248	12.897	16.669
Nurses	7998	21.486	33.429

Source: UAE Federal Competitiveness and Statistics Authority.

The government has also made significant investments in creating a network of private healthcare providers, which has been crucial in giving people who cannot afford or do not have access to public healthcare facilities access to high-quality basic healthcare services¹⁸. Additionally, the government has put in place a number of programs to encourage preventive healthcare and lower the prevalence of non-communicable diseases like diabetes and cardiovascular disease. Campaigns to promote healthy living are among them, as are initiatives that offer free testing and immunizations against certain diseases¹⁷.

The government is also spending money on innovative technology research and development that could increase access to high-quality basic healthcare services in the UAE. For instance, telemedicine is being used to offer patient and doctor consultations through the internet, and mobile applications are being created to make it easier for patients and their doctors to communicate¹⁹.

Table 2. Healthcare spending in the United Arab Emirates (UAE) broken down by Emirate in the year 2014, presented in billions of US dollars.

	Healthcare Expenditure (Billion US\$)
Abu Dhabi	4
Dubai	3.5
Northern Emirates	2.5
International Patient care	3.6
Total	13.6

Source: Dubai Health Authority, Health Authority Abu Dhabi, World Health Organization, US UAE Business Council.

The development of novel care delivery methods, expanded public health services, and increased access to health insurance are just a few examples of strategies that can be used to increase access to primary healthcare. Furthermore, research can support policy choices pertaining to primary healthcare in the UAE, such as establishing criteria for the quality of care and making sure that resources are allocated properly. In the end, studies examining the availability of high-quality primary healthcare in the UAE can contribute to ensuring that all residents have access to the treatment they require.

Enhancing accessibility to primary healthcare in the UAE can be achieved by integrating the principles of the Chronic Care Model (CCM) into the provision of public primary healthcare services. The CCM framework underscores patient-focused treatment, proactive health management, and efficient care coordination. By incorporating these CCM elements into its primary healthcare public services, the UAE can elevate care quality and promote better health results among its people²⁰. However, there are still some challenges facing the UAE's health sector, and there are many opportunities to fix them. As the goal of this paper.

CONCLUSION

Research on the availability of high-quality primary healthcare in the UAE can point out areas that need improvement. This might entail locating service gaps, figuring out the best ways to deliver care, and comprehending how to effectively serve various populations' requirements. The development of novel care delivery methods, expanded public health services, and increased access to health insurance are just a few examples of strategies that can be used to increase access to primary healthcare. Furthermore, research can support policy choices pertaining to primary healthcare in the UAE, such as establishing criteria for the quality of care and making sure that resources are allocated properly. In the end, studies examining the availability of high-quality primary healthcare in the UAE can contribute to ensuring that all residents have access to the treatment they require.

The research on expanding and enhancing basic healthcare access in the UAE has been successful in identifying problem areas and offering solutions. According to the report, there are weaknesses in the current healthcare system, including poor infrastructure, a lack of primary care services, and scarce funding. Additionally, it has drawn attention to the necessity of greater financial investment in healthcare infrastructure, enhanced collaboration primary care services are better integrated with other medical services and with providers both public and private

Additionally, research has shown methods for enhancing access to good primary healthcare, including raising knowledge of available services, boosting insurance coverage, and offering incentives to clinicians who deliver high-quality care. Studies have also highlighted the need of including stakeholders in the process of increasing access to high-quality basic healthcare. To guarantee that Every citizen and resident of the country has access to high-quality healthcare services, research relating to expanding and improving primary healthcare access in the UAE is crucial. Research can assist in identifying regions with insufficient access to healthcare as well as prospective methods for enhancing access. Research can also be used to pinpoint regions that require more resources, such as more medical staff, tools, or facilities. The best way to distribute resources to maximize the results of primary healthcare investments can also be learned from research. Finally, research can provide evidence-based recommendations to policymakers on how to best enhance access to high-quality primary healthcare in the UAE.

Recommendations:

1. The UAE government should fund research to expand and enhance the availability of high-quality primary healthcare in the nation. This study should concentrate on identifying the existing gaps in access to high-quality primary healthcare and investigating various remedies that could be put in place to close these gaps. Research should also examine the possibilities for enhancing access to top-notch primary healthcare through the use of technology and digital health solutions.
2. The UAE government should take into account rewarding private sector investment in the investigation and creation of novel approaches to enhancing access to high-quality basic healthcare. This can entail offering grants or tax breaks to businesses that are working on creative solutions to expand access to high-quality primary healthcare.

3. The UAE government should collaborate with regional universities and research organizations to create a thorough research agenda aimed at enhancing the nation's access to high-quality basic healthcare. Best practices for providing high-quality primary healthcare should be on the agenda, as well as research into potential new technology and digital health solutions and an evaluation of how current regulations affect access to such care.
4. The UAE government should work with other nations in the area, such as Saudi Arabia, Qatar, and Bahrain, that have already put successful plans in place to increase access to high-quality basic healthcare. The UAE can find excellent practices that can be modified and applied in its own environment by studying their experiences and benefiting from them.
5. In order for all parties involved in providing access to high-quality primary healthcare to effectively provide services to those who need them the most, the UAE government should make sure that they have received the necessary training and support, including funding, technology, and data collection tools.

CONFLICT OF INTEREST

No potential conflict of interest relevant to this article was reported.

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