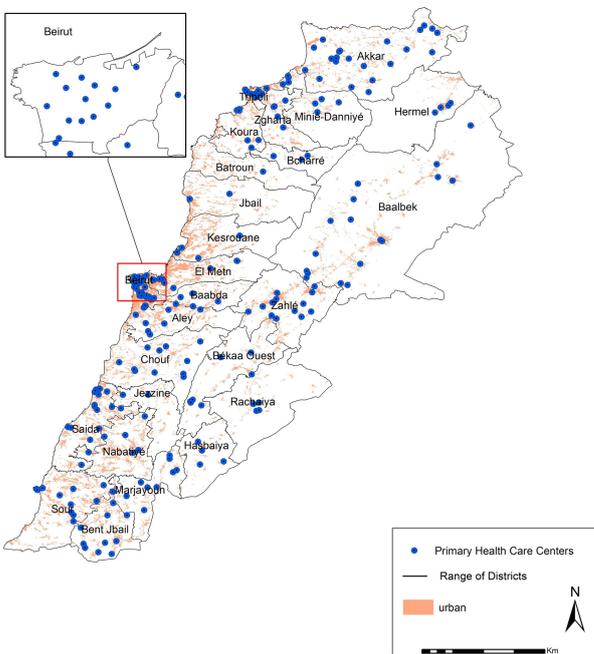


PHC IN ACTION

Official Newsletter of Primary Health Care Department



Geographical Distribution of Primary Health Care Centers



VACCINATION TREND

The years 2019-2020 have been harsh on the Lebanese citizens, not only have they witnessed and been victimized by multiple crises, but they also witnessed a significant drop in the national routine vaccination rate. This decrease is mainly attributed to movement restrictions associated with preventive measures against the COVID-19 pandemic and due to restricted access to health facilities either from financial or physical barriers. Regardless of the root cause of the decrease in the national routine vaccination rate, the latter is determined as a health hazard with the potential of having previously eradicated or controlled communicable diseases to surge again and ring the health alarm. The possibility of having multiple outbreaks in Lebanon in the near future is becoming a harsh reality that the Lebanese healthcare system can no longer ignore. As the Mass Vaccination Campaign on COVID-19 successfully targets our population, the probability of returning to norm is within our horizon, most notably resuming the lost academic year and opening up schools which would increase the likelihood of resurgence of communicable diseases among unvaccinated or drop out children. The PHCCs are actively following up with respective healthcare providers and reaching out to the community under the MoPH's Expanded Program on Immunization to try to minimize the risk, but that alone cannot ensure a safe environment to our children without the engagement and dedication of our communities.



The PHC Department at the MoPH would like to celebrate and acknowledge all the women in the PHCCs whether directors, administrators, nurses, social workers, physicians, pharmacists, therapists, cleaning workers or caregivers.

COLD CHAIN IN LEBANON

By the end of 2008, Lebanon was granted an International Cold Chain Certification award from WHO and UNICEF, becoming among the 5 countries worldwide to hold this certification. Several training sessions were conducted on a national level ever since to optimize the safe storage and handling of routine vaccines. Unfortunately, on August the 4th of 2020, the cold chain equipment stored at the MoPH's Central Drug Warehouse, were shattered by the Beirut Port Explosion. But the latter did not halt the safe handling and storage of vaccines, but further challenged the main stakeholders in the process to scale up their response to the challenge and to one day establish a more solid and resilient cold chain and to be internationally recognized again.

SEASON'S BLESSING AT KARAGHEUSIAN

With the dedication of an empowered team of women at the community development-culinary art program at Karagheusian Association, chocolate and cookies were baked as a token of appreciation to the society during Christmas to spread love, warmth, and blessings.



HEALTH INFORMATION SYSTEM

In June 2016, the PHC Department in collaboration with the IT Department at the MoPH generated a national health information system to be used as a unified system linking PHCCs and the MOPH together. The platform was given the name PHENICS which is an acronym to Primary Health carE Network Information Communication System. This HIS is used by several entities, most notably the staff at PHCCs. Staff at PHCCs use the platform as an electronic medical record for their beneficiaries, to order their stock of medical supplies and medications and to manage their in house stocks. Ever since the PHENICS went live and was being actively used by mentioned end users, the coding of the system was reactive to system errors and improvement measures. Most notably, the development of an automated monthly report filled by PHCCs to the MoPH regarding number of services and consultations delivered, number of vaccines provided, etc.. and the integration of a feedback mechanism linked to the online platform Telegram, linking the PHCCs to respective entities such as medical advisors in supporting organizations. In fact, feeding into the objective of the MoPH to promote continuous learning and self improvement, the IT department alongside the PHC Department at the MoPH, launched a youtube channel showering online training modules and videos, accessible to all at all times. The system maintenance and improvement requires full time dedication and that is currently being done by the IT Department at the MoPH.

CONTINUOUS LEARNING AND CAPACITY BUILDING OF PHC STAFF

As part of its consistent support and educational fueling, the Primary Health Care Department at the MoPH initiated a series of successive training sessions on the main pillars of the PHC program at the MoPH. The main aim of this initiative is to continuously reinforce the role and skills of healthcare workers at the PHC level and to provide quality PHC services to the network's beneficiaries. The training sessions were initiated in the PHCCs who adopted the Immediate Response Model to the Beirut Port Explosion and will expand to target all the PHCCs in the National Network. The trainings' audiences include physicians, nurses, midwives and social workers on the following topics: Acute Malnutrition, Extended Program of Immunization, Non-Communicable Diseases, Infection Prevention and Control, Physical Nursing Examination, Scabies, and Sexual and Reproductive Health. The PHC Department at the MoPH aims to strengthen the knowledge and skills of the staff and HCWs at all PHCCs in the National Network, fully believing and advocating that an empowered National Healthcare system is the one with a strong empowered Primary Healthcare system, and that could only be done by reinforcing its main pillar, its manpower.

HATS OFF FOR TRUE COMMITMENT

The Primary Healthcare Department at the MoPH alongside its partners, National Network beneficiaries would like to thank all the PHCCs that were greatly affected by the Port Explosion and still managed to provide first aid and PHC services to all beneficiaries.

PHCCS ACTIVITIES AMID COVID-19

Despite the consecutive national lockdowns due to the uncontrolled COVID-19 pandemic in Lebanon, the Primary Healthcare Centers within the National Network adopted a responsive strategy to alleviate the burden on outpatient centers and clinics and tertiary care hospitals. Despite the shift and focus of the healthcare system to a curative approach when it comes to COVID-19, PHCCs reinforced and emphasized the importance of screening, early detection and managed to sustain PHC essential services while prioritizing the safety of their own staff. That was further reinforced by several outreach activities conducted through several virtual channels to compensate for the physical distancing measures put in place, whether by reinforcing sending broadcasted messages promoting needed hygienic practices or essential educational material.

COMBATING ACUTE MALNUTRITION ONE PHCC AT A TIME

A 7-months old baby girl recovers from Severe Acute Malnutrition and gains 6 kg in four months after receiving adequate care and treatment at Al Makassed Primary Healthcare Center in Wadi Khaled.



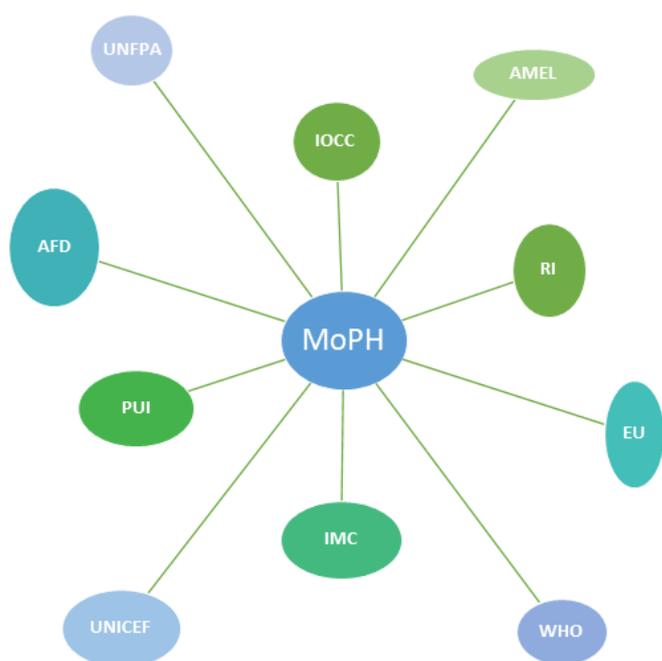
Before



After

IMMEDIATE RESPONSE MODEL TO THE BEIRUT PORT EXPLOSION

As a response to the Beirut Port Explosion, the PHC Department alongside its partners pledged to collaborate and join forces in building an immediate restorative response to the most affected PHCCs by the Beirut Port Explosion and to their beneficiaries. This joint venture permitted 17 PHCCs within the Greater Beirut area to rehabilitate and refurbish their facilities in due time, empower their staff and healthcare workers by building their capacity, and most importantly resume service delivery of subsidized PHC services to ensure continuity of care of the beneficiaries. This Immediate Response Model was set to take place for a duration of one year until a more sustainable and inclusive protocol would be available to be implemented in all the PHCCs of the National Network.



AMID MULTIPLE CRISES: THE WINDOW OF OPPORTUNITY FOR THE PHC SECTOR IN LEBANON?

The COVID-19 pandemic was indeed proof that weak health systems are bound to fail under pressure and that we, as countries, are as strong as our weakest link. The dire consequences of the pandemic alongside the social determinants of health were specially amplified in developing countries hosting displaced populations on both entities. With health seeming to be a luxury that is only available to those who can afford it, it is of no question that our health strategies should be restructured to be more inclusive and integrative of its vulnerable population at every level of our health systems. It is reasonable to compare a health system to a building, with Primary Healthcare as its network of columns and connecting beams which support the building's floors and walls, them being secondary and tertiary care. The PHC or the columns would carry all the load to the foundation and the weaker it is the more likely the building will collapse. Just like our building requires a strong foundation to hold it together, our health system requires a strong, resilient PHC to support and alleviate stressors on the secondary and tertiary care. That can only be done through promoting the equitable, sustainable, quality essential health services to our population without experiencing financial hardships. That should be implemented while guaranteeing a continuum of care that would enhance the country's health outcomes while decreasing the out of pocket expenditure on health. In fact, in 2018, Lebanon registered a significant 33.219% out of pocket expenditure on health, bypassing the acceptable ceiling of 14% set by WHO. As we go by day by day, the importance of having a resilient PHC offering basic benefit packages at affordable prices to residents of Lebanon becomes unquestionable. When every factor of a successful equation is available and ready like facilities, dedication, governance and oversight, leadership and all that is missing is a public health policy reinforcing the primary entry point of our Lebanese Health System and decreasing the out of pocket expenditure of residents on health.