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Understanding the Role of People's Primary Healthcare Initiative (PPHI) in Sindh

Sobia Abid¹

Abstract

Primary Healthcare (PHC) is a cornerstone of equitable and inclusive healthcare, involving integrated services, multisectoral collaboration and community empowerment. Recognized as the most cost-effective way of achieving universal health coverage, PHC addresses prevention, treatment and rehabilitation needs while enhancing resilience to health crises. Sindh province, home to 50.8 million people, reflects these disparities, particularly in rural areas, where poverty and insufficient infrastructure exacerbate vulnerabilities for women and children. To bridge these gaps, the Government of Sindh launched the People's Primary Healthcare Initiative (PPHI) in 2007. PPHI has significantly improved PHC service delivery through its network of health facilities, offering maternal care, immunization and community health services. This paper evaluates PPHI's contribution to enhancing PHC in Sindh, focusing on access to quality health services. The study uses qualitative methods to analyze PPHI's service delivery model and alignment with Sindh's healthcare needs, drawing from official reports and public health data. By examining PPHI's successes and challenges, the paper provides insights for stakeholders to strengthen PHC systems and proposes recommendations to amplify PPHI's impact on Sindh's healthcare landscape.

Keywords: Primary healthcare, Sindh, PPHI, Universal healthcare, Poverty, Service delivery

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Introduction

According to the World Health Organization (WHO), the right to the best possible health for everyone is the basic idea of primary healthcare (PHC). It is a whole-of-society approach to establish and strengthen national health systems, bringing health and wellness services closer to communities. Its three main components include: (i) Integrating health services to meet people's health needs; (ii) Addressing the broader determinants of health through multisectoral policy and action; and (iii) Empowering individuals, families and communities to manage their health.²

The PHC enables health systems to fulfill a person's health requirements, including illness prevention, treatment, rehabilitation and palliative care. People's needs and choices are respected while administering healthcare. PHC is recognized as the most inclusive, equitable and cost-effective approach to achieving universal health coverage. It is also critical for improving the resilience of healthcare systems to prepare for, respond to and recover from shocks and crises.³

PHC is a critical component of Pakistan's overall healthcare delivery framework. The system is characterized by a complex interplay between public and private sectors catering to a population of over 247 million. PHC system faces significant challenges, including high maternal and child mortality rates, infectious diseases and inadequate healthcare infrastructure—particularly in rural areas. Pakistan's healthcare spending is around 1% of its GDP (2023-24), one of the lowest in the region.⁴

The Universal Health Coverage (UHC) remains at only 21% in the country. Every 50 minutes, a woman dies from pregnancy complications in Pakistan.⁵ The country's maternal mortality rate (MMR) is 186 deaths per 100,000 live births and the infant mortality rate is 67 deaths per 1,000 live births. Pakistan's MMR remains higher than the other regional countries such as Bangladesh, India and Iran.⁶ Around 41.3% of women of reproductive age

² World Health Organization, *Primary Health Care*, last modified 2024, https://www.who.int/health-topics/primary-health-care#tab=tab_1.

³ World Health Organization, *Primary Health Care*.

⁴ Government of Pakistan, Ministry of Finance, Pakistan Economic Survey 2023-24: Health, https://www.finance.gov.pk/survey/chapter_24/11_health.pdf.

⁵ "Pakistan Will End Preventable Maternal Deaths after 122 Years If the Current Pace Continues." Last modified 2024. UNFPA Pakistan. <https://pakistan.unfpa.org/en/news/pakistan-will-end-preventable-maternal-deaths-after-122-years-if-current-pace-continues>.

⁶ "Strategic Purchasing for Primary Health Care," accessed December 28, 2024, <https://thinkwell.global/wp-content/uploads/2024/04/Pakistan-Brief-4-12-1.pdf>.

(15 to 49 years) in Pakistan are afflicted with anemia.⁷ About 37.6% of children under the age of five suffer from stunting, which is higher than Asia's average of 21.8%.⁸

Sindh, Pakistan's second most populous province with a population of 55.69 million, faces notable health issues. People in many areas of rural Sindh have poor access to healthcare services due to challenges such as inadequate infrastructure, shortage of qualified healthcare providers and insufficient funding. According to a study published in 2023, Sindh had 83,943 registered physicians including specialists and 29,637 nurses, Lady Health Visitors (LHVs) and Community-based Midwives (CMWs) to serve the entire population of Sindh.⁹ Nearly half of Sindh's population lives in rural areas and about 37% of the rural population lives below the poverty line, which is higher than the country's average.¹⁰ Women and children are more vulnerable in these areas.

In response to these challenges, the Government of Sindh established the People's Primary Healthcare Initiative (PPHI) in 2007. Since its establishment, PPHI has played an important role in addressing PHC gaps by providing accessible and affordable healthcare services. This has resulted in improved health outcomes for rural and vulnerable communities.¹¹

A 2014 study assessed the quality of healthcare services at PPHI Basic Health Units (BHUs) managed by PPHI compared to those managed by the local district government. The research employed a cross-sectional mixed-methods approach, including focus group discussions, in-depth interviews and resource availability checklists. The findings revealed that PPHI-managed BHUs demonstrated significant improvements in infrastructure, staff attendance and the availability of essential medicines and qualified healthcare workers. These facilities outperformed district government-managed BHUs in service quality, although challenges such as long waiting times and patient travel distances persisted. The study highlighted

⁷ Government of Pakistan, Pakistan Economic Survey 2022–23: Health Chapter, accessed December 28, 2024, https://www.finance.gov.pk/survey/chapters_23/11_Health.pdf.

⁸ Government of Pakistan, Pakistan Economic Survey 2022–23.

⁹ R. Khan, "Causes and Consequences of the Shortage of Physicians in Sindh, Pakistan: A Local Perspective," *Journal of the Pakistan Medical Association* 73, no. 8 (August 2023): 1693–99, <https://doi.org/10.47391/JPMA.7593>.

¹⁰ World Bank, *Factsheet: Strengthening Social Protection Delivery System in Sindh*, accessed December 28, 2024, <https://www.worldbank.org/en/news/factsheet/2022/12/19/factsheet-strengthening-social-protection-delivery-system-in-sindh>.

¹¹ PPHI Sindh, *About Us*, accessed December 28, 2024, <https://pphisindh.org/home/about-us.php>.

the potential of public-private partnerships in enhancing primary healthcare delivery in resource-constrained settings while emphasizing the need for further evaluation to address equity and accessibility concerns.¹²

In 2019, the PPHI Sindh conducted a comprehensive Impact Assessment Survey (IAS) to evaluate the effectiveness of its interventions on key health indicators for children and women in rural Sindh. The survey, carried out by PPHI Sindh's Research Wing, aimed to provide evidence-based findings for informing policy decisions and improving primary healthcare services in the region. The IAS 2019 covered more than 25 indicators spanning 20 primary healthcare facilities. According to the Survey, immunization efforts in Dadu district showed progress towards the achievement of targets of Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), highlighting the potential of Public-Private Partnerships in Expanded Program on Immunization (EPI) to enhance coverage in other districts as well. However, the same IAS indicated that Jacobabad district faced higher malnutrition rates, likely linked to poor Maternal, Newborn and Child Health (MNCH) indicators, high illiteracy and poverty.¹³

The PPHI Research Wing plays a crucial role in generating evidence-based insights on evaluating healthcare interventions, service delivery models and public health challenges for the information of practitioners and policymakers. Despite PPHI's significant contributions in improving healthcare in Sindh, there is a notable lack of research on its impact and effectiveness. Limited scholarly work exists on PPHI's role in addressing healthcare disparities and improving health outcomes in Sindh. This gap underscores the need for rigorous studies to assess its successes, identify areas for improvement and provide guidance for future healthcare strategies.

The paper explores the role of PPHI in improving PHC delivery in Sindh by examining two key areas: (i) the impact of PPHI on the accessibility of PHC services in rural and underserved areas; and (ii) the strategies implemented by PPHI to enhance the quality of PHC services in Sindh as well as their effectiveness. By analyzing PPHI's service delivery model, this study provides a comprehensive assessment of PPHI's effectiveness and alignment with the healthcare needs of the population in Sindh. The goal is to provide

¹² Sana Tanzil, Aysha Zahidie, Adeel Ahsan, Ambreen Kazi, and Babar Tasneem Shaikh, "Contracting Primary Health Care Services Improves Quality and Coverage in Rural Sindh, Pakistan," *BMC Health Services Research* 14, no. 1 (2014): 277, <https://doi.org/10.1186/1472-6963-14-277>.

¹³ PPHI Sindh, *IAS Key Finding Report – Draft V-5*, <https://pphisindh.org/home/pic/Bulletin/IAS%20Key%20Finding%20Report-%20Draft-V-5.pdf>.

recommendations that can further enhance PPHI's impact and inform future policies to improve primary healthcare delivery in the province.

The study uses a qualitative approach, analyzing open-access data from PPHI and other public sources. It reviews healthcare programs, service models and community engagement through reports, case studies and health data, supplemented by government reports and public health studies.

Establishment of PPHI

PPHI Sindh was established in 2007 in response to the urgent need for improved healthcare services in rural areas of the province. The organization began its operations in District Kashmore and has expanded to 27 districts in Sindh. Initially established under a partnership with the Sindh Rural Support Organization (SRSO), PPHI transitioned into an independent non-profit entity in 2013. The Pakistan Centre of Philanthropy has also recognized PPHI for its dedication to social welfare and public service.¹⁴

Aims and Objectives of PPHI

The primary aim of PPHI Sindh is to enhance the accessibility and quality of healthcare services for underserved populations, particularly in rural areas. PPHI aims to establish a healthcare system prioritizing preventive and curative care, thereby improving community health outcomes. The initiative is dedicated to establishing health facilities as vibrant centers of care that provide medical services and engage with the community to promote health awareness and education. PPHI aims to reduce health disparities and ensure that all individuals have equitable access to essential healthcare services by focusing on vulnerable groups, especially women and children.¹⁵

PPHI Sindh focuses on strengthening primary healthcare services, community engagement, capacity building for healthcare providers and addressing health inequities. It aims to establish a well-managed network of health facilities offering comprehensive care, particularly in maternal and child health, immunization and outpatient services. Upgrading BHUs into 24/7 maternity centers and ensuring the availability of essential medical supplies are key initiatives to enhance service delivery. Community involvement is central

¹⁴ PPHI Sindh, *Annual Report 2022–2023*, accessed February 10, 2025, <https://pphisindh.org/home/pic/Bulletin/Annual%20Report%202022-%202023.pdf>.

¹⁵ PPHI Sindh, *About Us*, accessed February 10, 2025, <https://pphisindh.org/home/about-us.php>.

to PPHI's approach, fostering ownership and participation in health programs to improve outcomes.¹⁶

The organization also prioritizes capacity building through continuous professional development for doctors, nurses and midwives, ensuring that they are well-equipped to meet healthcare demands. By investing in human resources, PPHI ensures that healthcare providers are well-equipped to deliver high-quality care and respond effectively to the health needs of their communities.¹⁷ Additionally, PPHI seeks to reduce health disparities by eliminating financial and geographic barriers, providing free medicines, laboratory tests and essential medical services to underserved populations.¹⁸

Organizational Structure of PPHI

PPHI Sindh is overseen by a Board of Directors composed of eight seasoned members with diverse expertise in various sectors, including health, finance, population welfare and planning and development. This Board plays a crucial role in setting policies, guiding the organization's strategic vision and ensuring accountability in its operation.¹⁹ The leadership and management teams at PPHI are responsible for the day-to-day operations and implementation of strategic initiatives. These include roles such as chief executive officer, chief operating officer, program directors, regional managers, district managers and healthcare professionals who work collaboratively to ensure that health facilities operate efficiently.²⁰

The management team is vital in ensuring the efficient delivery of healthcare services in its facilities. Its key responsibilities include operational oversight, and managing logistics to ensure facilities are adequately staffed and equipped. The team also oversees program implementation, coordinating maternal and child health initiatives, immunization campaigns and community health education. Through robust monitoring and evaluation, it assesses service effectiveness and identifies areas for improvement.²¹

PPHI Sindh operates regional offices in the province to manage health

¹⁶ PPHI Sindh, *What We Do*, accessed February 10, 2025, <https://pphisindh.org/home/what-we-do.php>.

¹⁷ PPHI Sindh, *Capacity Building*, accessed February 10, 2025, <https://pphisindh.org/home/capacity-building.php>.

¹⁸ PPHI Sindh, *Routine Health Care Services*, accessed February 10, 2025, https://pphisindh.org/home/routine_health_care_services.php.

¹⁹ PPHI Sindh, *Board of Directors*, last modified 2018, <https://pphisindh.org/home/bod.php>.

²⁰ PPHI Sindh, *Management Members*, last modified 2018, https://pphisindh.org/home/management_member.php.

²¹ PPHI Sindh, *Management Members*.

facilities efficiently and ensure localized service delivery. They allocate medical resources based on need assessments and monitor performance by collecting service delivery data for central evaluation.²²

PPHI Sindh has established an extensive network of health facilities in 27 districts of Sindh, significantly enhancing healthcare access for underserved populations. As of now, PPHI manages over 1,358 health facilities, which include:²³

- i. Basic Health Units (BHUs): These primary care centers provide essential health services such as maternal and child healthcare, immunizations and outpatient services.
- ii. Rural Health Centers (RHCs): Offering more comprehensive services than BHUs, RHCs cater to larger populations with additional resources for emergency care.
- iii. Taluka Headquarters Hospitals (THQs): These facilities provide secondary care services and are equipped to handle more complex medical cases.
- iv. Mother and Child Health Centers (MCHCs): These centers specifically focus on maternal and child health and offer specialized services, including prenatal care, safe delivery options and postnatal support.
- v. Outpatient Therapeutic Programs (OTPs): PPHI has implemented over 1,000 to address prevalent health challenges within communities.²⁴

This extensive network of PPHI Sindh ensures that essential healthcare services are accessible even in remote areas, improving overall health outcomes in Sindh.

Key Services Offered by PPHI in Sindh

The PPHI Sindh provides a comprehensive range of healthcare services to improve health outcomes for the population, particularly in rural and underserved areas. Key services include: (i) Maternal and Child Health Services; (ii) Immunization Programs; (iii) Outpatient Services and Preventive Care; (iv) District Health Information System; and (v) Special Programs Targeting Vulnerable Populations.

Maternal and child health (MCH) services are crucial for reducing

²² PPHI Sindh, *About Us*, accessed February 10, 2025, <https://pphisindh.org/home/about-us.php>.

²³ PPHI Sindh, *About Us*.

²⁴ PPHI Sindh, *About Us*.

maternal and infant mortality rates and include antenatal care, which involves regular check-ups for pregnant women to monitor their health and fetal development. PPHI also provides safe delivery options, including regular vaginal deliveries and cesarean sections available 24/7 at upgraded BHUs.²⁵ Additionally, postnatal care is provided to ensure the health and well-being of mothers and newborns after childbirth. These services are designed to promote safe motherhood and improve health outcomes for mothers and children, ensuring that they receive necessary care throughout pregnancy, birth and early childhood. Family planning services are also available, offering access to various contraceptive methods along with counseling to help families manage their reproductive health effectively.²⁶

Immunization is a cornerstone of preventive healthcare strategy. PPHI Sindh actively supports the Expanded Program on Immunization (EPI) to reduce child morbidity and mortality, contributing to the SDG 3. Since 2019, PPHI Sindh has been working with the EPI program in Dadu and Khairpur districts, focusing on controlling vaccine-preventable diseases among children. The EPI program in Pakistan, initially established in 1976 with six essential antigens, now offers twelve different antigens, with PPHI Sindh playing a crucial role in its implementation within the specified districts. Awareness campaigns are also part of the program to educate families about the importance of vaccination and ensure high coverage rates.²⁷

A comprehensive range of outpatient services are offered at PPHI healthcare centers that address various health issues. These services include diagnosing and managing common illnesses such as hypertension, diabetes, pneumonia, diarrhea, malaria and urinary tract infections. Additionally, PPHI provides preventive health services through health education sessions focused on nutrition, hygiene and disease prevention strategies. A key component of these outpatient services is the provision of free medicines for common illnesses to ensure that financial constraints do not limit access to necessary treatments. By offering these essential healthcare services at no cost or minimal expense, PPHI Sindh plays a crucial role in addressing immediate health concerns while promoting preventive care practices within communities in Sindh.²⁸

²⁵ PPHI Sindh, *Pregnancy, Childbirth, Postpartum, and Newborn Care*, accessed February 10, 2025,

<https://pphisindh.org/home/pregnancy-childbirth-postpartum-and-newborn-care.php>.

²⁶ PPHI Sindh, *Sexual and Reproductive Health*, accessed February 10, 2025,

<https://pphisindh.org/home/sexual-and-reproductive-health.php>.

²⁷ PPHI Sindh, *Expanded Program on Immunization (EPI)*, accessed February 10, 2025,

<https://pphisindh.org/home/epi.php>.

²⁸ PPHI Sindh, *Routine Health Care Services*, accessed February 10, 2025,

https://pphisindh.org/home/routine_health_care_services.php.

PPHI Sindh uses the District Health Information System (DHIS) to record and report healthcare service data at facilities and within communities. DHIS tracks health facility performance, disease trends and resource allocation, aiding decision-making, planning and policy formulation. DHIS serves as a structured method for gathering information about the performance of health facilities in districts. Data is recorded daily in 17 registers for OPD and family planning services, compiled monthly and uploaded online for access at district, provincial and national levels.²⁹

In addition to its comprehensive healthcare services, PPHI implements special programs specifically designed to address the needs of vulnerable populations. Nutrition initiatives aimed at combating malnutrition among pregnant women, lactating mothers and young children through education on healthy dietary practices, micronutrient supplementation and the provision of fortified foods.³⁰

Special programs also include targeted health campaigns. PPHI conducts campaigns to address specific health issues prevalent in the community, such as hepatitis control programs and tuberculosis management initiatives. These campaigns often involve screening, diagnosis, treatment and public awareness efforts to mitigate the impact of these diseases. Through these targeted programs, PPHI seeks to enhance healthcare access for marginalized groups while addressing broader public health challenges in Sindh.³¹

Foreign Collaboration

PPHI Sindh collaborates with various international organizations to enhance healthcare service delivery and address public health challenges. These collaborations include partnerships with entities like USAID's Global Health Supply Chain Program and the World Bank, focusing on areas such as commodity security, supply chain management and the Sindh Integrated Health Project Program.³² In 2023, around 32,000 cartons of Ready to Use Therapeutic Food (RUTF) were donated in collaboration with Pathfinder and USAID for managing Severe Acute Malnutrition (SAM) in children during the post-flood

²⁹ PPHI Sindh, *District Health Information System (DHIS)*, accessed February 10, 2025, <https://pphisindh.org/home/dhis.php>.

³⁰ PPHI Sindh, *Nutrition*, accessed February 10, 2025, <https://pphisindh.org/home/nutrition.php>.

³¹ PPHI Sindh, *Newsletter (July - September 2024)*, accessed February 10, 2025, [https://pphisindh.org/home/pic/Bulletin/Newsletter%20\(Jul%20-%20Sep%2024\).pdf](https://pphisindh.org/home/pic/Bulletin/Newsletter%20(Jul%20-%20Sep%2024).pdf).

³² PPHI Sindh, "News and Events," accessed February 10, 2025, https://pphisindh.org/home/news_slide.php?id=11.

³³ PPHI Sindh, *Annual Report 2022–2023*.

rehabilitation phase.³³

In May 2024, the Social Protection Authority (SPA), the World Bank and PPHI Sindh conducted a comprehensive performance review of the NHSP-1000 Days project and MCSP-CCT. The review focused on strategies to enhance service accessibility and improve infrastructure, highlighting key measures for advancing healthcare delivery.³⁴

In January 2025, PPHI Sindh and the Gates Foundation held a strategic meeting to advance healthcare for underserved communities. The discussion centered on the E-Motive PPH Bundle project proposal to combat postpartum hemorrhage and explored potential collaborations to enhance primary healthcare services in Sindh province.³⁵

Impact of PPHI on Healthcare Delivery in Sindh

PPHI Sindh has made substantial progress in its mission to ensure equitable access to quality healthcare services, particularly for disadvantaged communities in the province. Despite significant challenges, including the COVID-19 pandemic and the devastating 2022 floods, PPHI Sindh remained committed to delivering essential healthcare services. Through strategic interventions, the organization has expanded its healthcare reach, addressing key public health concerns and improving overall health outcomes. These efforts reflect PPHI Sindh's resilience and dedication to mitigating healthcare disparities and strengthening the province's primary healthcare infrastructure.

A critical area of focus for PPHI Sindh has been MNCH, alongside nutrition, immunization and family planning. In 2023, 40.8 million OPD visits were conducted, including 26.5 million new cases and 14.3 million follow-ups. Essential healthcare services were extended to 6 million children under the age of five, with targeted interventions addressing malnutrition (2.3 million cases), pneumonia (456,839 cases) and diarrhea (over 1 million cases). Preventive healthcare measures also played a pivotal role, as reflected in the administration of vaccines. Around 731,591 children received their third Penta vaccine, 717,460 received their first measles vaccine and 608,801 pregnant women were immunized with the TT2 vaccine. Such large-scale immunization efforts significantly reduce preventable diseases and improve child survival rates in Sindh.³⁶

³⁴ PPHI Sindh, "News and Events," accessed February 10, 2025, https://pphisindh.org/home/news_slide.php?id=280.

³⁵ PPHI Sindh, "News and Events," accessed February 10, 2025, https://pphisindh.org/home/news_slide.php?id=353.

³⁶ PPHI Sindh, *Annual Report 2022–2023*, accessed February 10, 2025, <https://pphisindh.org/home/pic/Bulletin/Annual%20Report%202022-%202023.pdf>.

PPHI Sindh has also emphasized reproductive and maternal health services, ensuring comprehensive family planning and antenatal care coverage. In 2023, over 1 million individuals benefited from family planning services, with 715,815 women receiving their first antenatal care visit and 410,496 attending their first postnatal care check-up. Furthermore, PPHI Sindh facilitated 345,018 deliveries, resulting in 339,005 live births. These statistics underscore the organization's commitment to reducing maternal and neonatal mortality by promoting institutional deliveries and improving access to skilled birth attendants. The expansion of maternal health services reflects a proactive approach to addressing high maternal and infant mortality rates in the region.³⁷

In 2024, PPHI facilitated approximately 44.76 million outpatient visits, providing free, high-quality diagnosis, treatment and management in accordance with standard protocols. To ensure comprehensive healthcare delivery, 16.55 million follow-up visits were conducted, emphasizing the importance of continuity of care. Additionally, 359,357 normal vaginal deliveries (NVDs) were performed, with most pregnant women pre-booked during antenatal checkups, where they received essential services such as deworming, iron and folic acid supplementation. Furthermore, 1.23 million family planning interventions were carried out, playing a crucial role in improving quality of life, reducing maternal and neonatal morbidity and mortality.³⁸

Sustainability and healthcare accessibility remain at the core of PPHI Sindh's operational framework. In line with its green approach, the organization has equipped 675 healthcare facilities with solar power systems with a total capacity of 2.66 megawatts. This initiative ensures uninterrupted healthcare service delivery, particularly in remote areas with inconsistent electricity supply. Additionally, the provision of 267 ambulances, stationed in different districts, has improved emergency medical response. These ambulances provide free transportation for MNCH clients, road traffic accident victims and patients requiring specialized nutritional support.³⁹

Rescue 1020 and Rescue 1122 are two significant emergency ambulance services operating in Sindh. Rescue 1020 primarily operates as an ambulance service under the Chhipa Welfare Association in Karachi. Rescue 1122 operates under the Sindh Emergency Rescue Service (SERS) and was

³⁷ PPHI Sindh, *Annual Report 2022–2023*.

³⁸ PPHI Sindh, "Home," accessed February 10, 2025, <https://pphisindh.org/home/index.php>

³⁹ PPHI Sindh, *Annual Report 2022–2023*, accessed February 10, 2025, <https://pphisindh.org/home/pic/Bulletin/Annual%20Report%202022-%202023.pdf>.

officially launched in May 2022. This service operates throughout Sindh, providing timely medical assistance, firefighting and rescue operations.⁴⁰

PPHI Sindh has expanded surgical interventions to include C-sections at Sindh Government Hospital Murad Memon and Sindh Government Hospital Ibrahim Hyderi. Since the inception of this service in September 2023, approximately 300 C-sections have been performed, significantly reducing the financial burden for underprivileged families. The availability of cost-effective surgical procedures ensures that women in need of critical obstetric care receive timely interventions, thereby preventing complications and improving maternal and neonatal health outcomes.⁴¹

Neonatal mortality remains a significant global concern. Pakistan ranks third worldwide in neonatal mortality rates, accounting for 7% of global neonatal deaths. Kangaroo Mother Care (KMC), which involves skin-to-skin contact and exclusive breastfeeding has been widely recognized as an effective intervention for improving the survival rates of premature and low birthweight (LBW) infants. LBW or premature babies need specialized incubator care because these babies cannot maintain their body temperature.⁴²

Recognizing the potential of KMC in improving neonatal survival, PPHI Sindh introduced this intervention in 2016, prioritizing its implementation in the province. As of 2023, PPHI Sindh had established 300 KMC units in 389 health facilities, ensuring greater access to this life-saving practice. During 2022-23, 14,789 premature and LBW infants were admitted to these units, with 27,608 successfully discharged after receiving necessary care. To ensure the effective delivery of KMC services, PPHI Sindh has focused on training healthcare professionals and caregivers to provide adequate care for preterm and LBW infants. To date, 1,570 employees have been trained in KMC, with 260 individuals receiving training between July and December 2022 and January and December 2023.⁴³

PPHI has significantly enhanced the accessibility of healthcare services in rural areas of Sindh by expanding its network of health facilities. PPHI operates over 1,358 health facilities in 27 districts. This extensive network

⁴⁰ Chhipa Welfare Association, "About Us," accessed February 10, 2025, <https://www.chhipa.org/about-us/>.

⁴¹ PPHI Sindh, *Annual Report 2022–2023*. <https://pphisindh.org/home/pic/Bulletin/Annual%20Report%202022-%202023.pdf>.

⁴² PPHI Sindh. *Annual Report 2022-2023*.

⁴³ PPHI Sindh. *Annual Report 2022-2023*.

⁴⁴ PPHI Sindh. *About Us*. Karachi: PPHI Sindh. Accessed February 11, 2025. <https://pphisindh.org/home/about-us.php>.

ensures that essential healthcare services are available even in remote locations with limited access.⁴⁴

PPHI addresses financial barriers often preventing individuals from seeking necessary care by providing free medicines and laboratory tests. The organization's commitment to ensuring that healthcare facilities are staffed with qualified personnel, including female doctors and trained midwives, further facilitates access to quality healthcare for women and children in rural communities.⁴⁵

PPHI prioritizes community engagement to enhance health outcomes through awareness initiatives on preventive care. These include workshops and campaigns on maternal and child health, nutrition, family planning and disease prevention. Outreach programs promote healthcare services like immunizations and antenatal care while training for providers reinforces community education. By fostering awareness and empowering individuals, PPHI enables informed healthcare decisions. In 2023, around 51,247 community support meetings focused on health promotion and disease prevention were held by PPHI Sindh.⁴⁶

PPHI's Role During 2022 Floods in Sindh

During the 2022 floods in Sindh, PPHI provided critical health services to affected communities. It implemented a comprehensive health service delivery package in flood-affected districts, ensuring that health facilities remained operational and delivered essential services. The organization collaborated with international partners, such as USAID, to enhance health service delivery and address key health challenges, including maternal, neonatal and child mortality.⁴⁷

Operating in the severely flooded districts of Sindh, PPHI collaborated closely with Pathfinder International to address urgent needs. Key interventions included distributing 1.5 million sachets of Ready-to-Use Therapeutic Food to 16,309 malnourished children, providing 8,000 Lady Health Worker kits,

⁴⁴ PPHI Sindh. *About Us*. Karachi: PPHI Sindh. Accessed February 11, 2025. <https://pphisindh.org/home/about-us.php>.

⁴⁵ PPHI Sindh. *About Us*.

⁴⁶ PPHI Sindh, *Annual Report 2022–2023*.

<https://pphisindh.org/home/pic/Bulletin/Annual%20Report%202022-%202023.pdf>.

⁴⁷ LMIS Pakistan, Thatta District Package, accessed February 10, 2025, https://lmis.gov.pk/docs/sindh/district_packages/thatta.pdf.

furnishing 100 outpatient clinics, conducting 886 community-based health sessions and establishing around 100 birthing stations.⁴⁸

Additionally, PPHI integrated nutrition services with family planning and maternal, neonatal and child health (MNCH) services, providing vital support to combat malnutrition and stunting among children in flooded areas.⁴⁹

Challenges Faced by the Healthcare System in Sindh

Despite its efforts to improve healthcare services, PPHI faces the same challenges that the healthcare systems in Sindh generally encounter. Lack of sufficient funds remains a major obstacle. In FY 2024-25, Rs 14.51 billion has been budgeted for PPHI out of a total of Rs 302.15 billion.⁵⁰ This accounts for only 4.8% of Sindh's total health budget, which is insufficient given the scale of services mandated under PPHI Sindh. As a result, health outcomes lag behind with higher pregnancy-related deaths and maternal mortality rates. Contraceptive use remains low and rural health facilities suffer from inadequate resources, including trained staff, medicines and equipment. Moreover, many women face barriers to accessing healthcare due to social norms, family restrictions and safety concerns. The 2022 floods exacerbated these issues, damaging hundreds of health facilities and disrupting healthcare services, leading to a rise in vector-borne diseases, diarrhea and malnutrition.⁵¹

Conclusion

PPHI has significantly improved primary healthcare in Sindh, particularly in maternal and child health through skilled birth attendance and essential obstetric care. Its integrated approach, encompassing nutrition programs, family planning and community engagement, enhances healthcare accessibility. However, challenges such as resource constraints, workforce shortages and geographic barriers impact service delivery and consistency.

⁴⁸ Pathfinder International, "Launching a Project During a Natural Disaster: Local Partnerships Are Critical," accessed February 10, 2025, <https://www.pathfinder.org/impact-stories/launching-a-project-during-a-natural-disaster-local-partnerships-are-critical/>.

⁴⁹ LMIS Pakistan, *Thatta District Package*, accessed February 10, 2025, https://lmis.gov.pk/docs/sindh/district_packages/thatta.pdf.

⁵⁰ Government of Sindh, Budget Speech 2024-25, <https://finance.gos.pk/Home/Download?path=Budget%5CBudgetSpeech%5CBudget%20Speech%202024-25%20English.pdf>.

⁵¹ World Bank, *Factsheet: Sindh Integrated Health and Population Project*, accessed February 10, 2025, <https://www.worldbank.org/en/news/factsheet/2022/12/19/factsheet-sindh-integrated-health-and-population-project>.

Addressing these issues through sustainable funding, provider training and technology-driven solutions is essential. With continued investment and policy support, PPHI can further strengthen healthcare equity and community health in Sindh, driving transformative change in the province's healthcare system.