

# **The World Health Organization programme to measure health systems performance, and how it can help governments in improving performance**

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## ABSTRACT

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The debate about appropriate health system policies and strategies has been hampered by inadequate information about the extent to which systems contribute to a set of socially desirable goals. The World Health Report 2000 proposed a framework for measuring the attainment of health systems in terms of 3 socially desirable goals. The defining goal of health systems is to improve health. But people also expect them to be responsive to their legitimate non-health needs and to ensure that financial contributions to the system are distributed fairly across households. The goals of improving health and responsiveness contain two components – improving the average level and reducing inequalities. Accordingly, five indicators of goal attainment were defined - the level of population health, inequalities in health outcomes, the level of responsiveness, inequalities in responsiveness, and the fairness of household financial contributions to health. The World Health Report measured the inputs used to achieving these goals – health system and non-health system inputs – and an index of the efficiency with which the goals were attained given these inputs.

The Report stimulated vigorous debate which WHO has encouraged through direct interaction with governments at the individual and regional levels, technical consultations on particular issues, and submission of its methods to the scientific literature for peer review. This presentation will summarize briefly the framework, then focus on some of the major conceptual and methodological debates emerging since the report's publication. The major conceptual issues relate to the boundaries of the system, the concept of causality, the question of attribution of responsibility for outcomes, and whether goals are universal. Methodological debates have focused on the measurement of healthy life expectancy, health inequalities, responsiveness, fairness of household financial contributions and efficiency. The talk will report some of the recent technical work undertaken to explore these methodological issues. The final part of the talk will focus on work to link the measurement of outcomes and inputs with the analysis of the functions of health systems, thereby leading to the development of practical policy implications for ways to improve health system performance.