

# Chapter 1: Human Resources for Health: A Strategic Plan

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# Chapter 1: Human Resources for Health: A Strategic Plan

## 1.1 Introduction

The performance of health systems is influenced significantly by the extent to which health workforce planning is done. The field of Human Resources for Health has gained immense international prominence with human resource planning, spurred by the unprecedented international migration of health professionals, being viewed as a vital activity within planning for the broader sector. The task of health workforce planning is complicated by many global and disease challenges. The National Department of Health grappled with these issues and in August 2005 produced a Strategic Framework for the Human Resources for Health Plan for comment by the public as a the first step towards developing a country Human Resources Plan for Health.

The country HRH Plan subsequently developed from the strategic framework is presented in 5 chapters. The first chapter provides the rationale and objectives that underpin the HRH Plan and outlines the process followed in developing the Plan. Chapter 2 is a rapid appraisal and analysis of Human Resources in the S.A. health care system and highlights the status of HRH policy and planning in the country. Chapter 3 flags out the major HRH challenges that the SA health care system faces, which the Plan now seeks to address. The proposed elements of the Plan, elaborated upon through a set of strategic objectives, are presented in Chapter 4. In chapter 5, a number of areas that have been prioritised for implementation are introduced to stimulate further discussion and debate and facilitate the development of an HR agenda for immediate implementation.

## 1.2 Purpose

The purpose of this National Human Resource for Health plan is to put in place a national guideline for human resource policy and planning which spans the entire health system. Human resource planning is essential for any organisation to ensure that its human resources are capable of meeting its operational objectives. Such planning ensures that an organisation obtains the (right) quality and (adequate) quantity of the staff it requires; makes the optimum use of its human resources; is able to anticipate and manage surpluses and shortages of staff; and develops a multi-skilled, representative and flexible workforce, which enables the organisation to adapt rapidly to a changing operational environment.

The plan will serve as a reference point for province-specific HR Plans and will provide managers with an overall framework for recruiting and developing appropriate retention strategies in their provinces.

## 1.3 Process and Approach

The Department's Human Resource Branch spearheaded the development of the Human Resources for Health Plan, but the content of the plan reflects the collective thinking of a wide range of stakeholders who were consulted extensively throughout the process.

### 1.3.1 Points of Departure

In communicating this plan the following points of departure are made:

- That the South African National Human Resource for Health plan is a central element for the realisation of the national health strategic priorities
- That both the public and private health sectors urgently need the national plan to guide them in strengthening the planning, development and management of the health system
- That although the country possesses the necessary resources to implement the national human resource plan, these need to be provided adequately and equitably
- That this HRH plan is a vehicle for supporting of health services through the provincial service platforms
- That this plan (complemented by infrastructure and financing) is a major input vehicle to strengthening

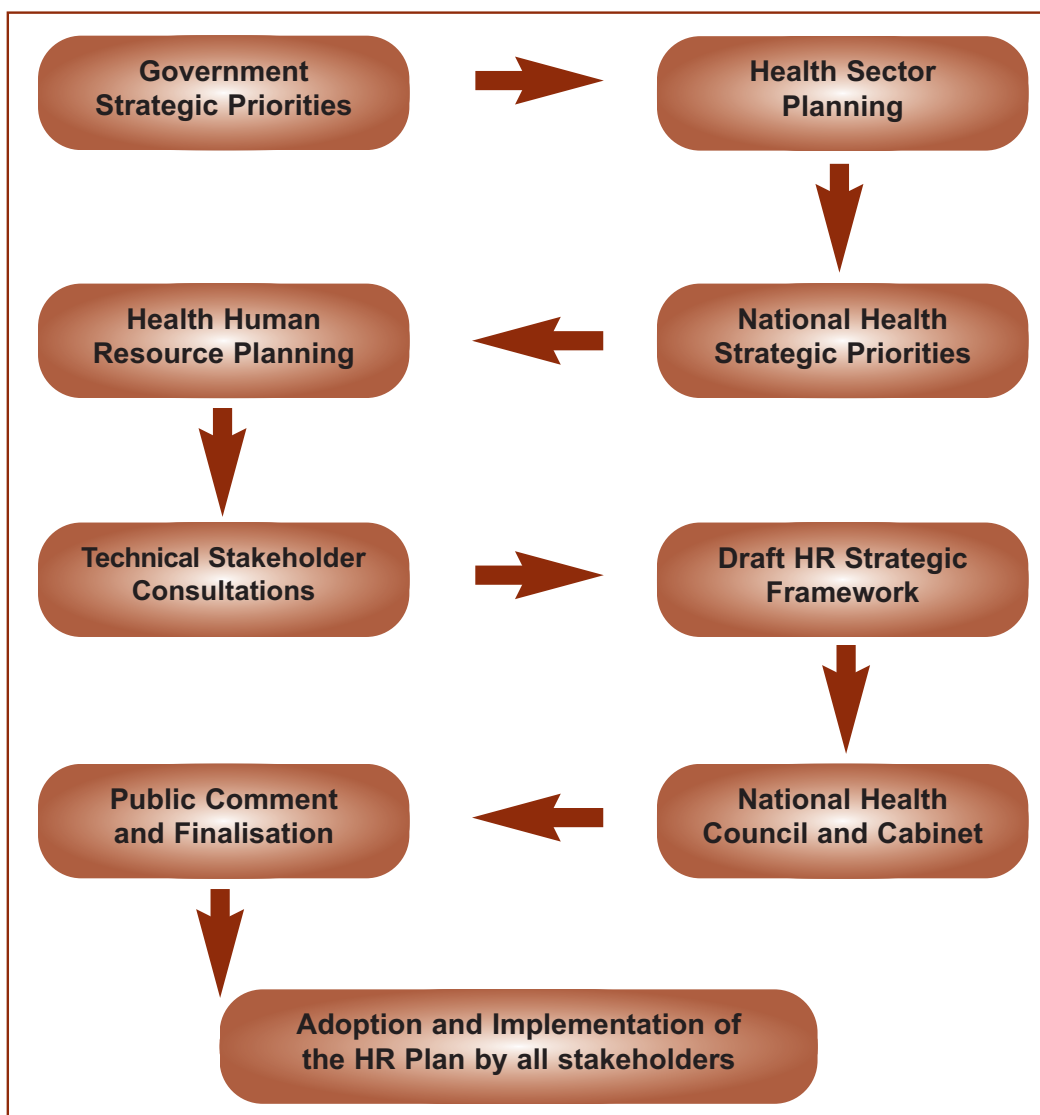
- the health system
- That it is essential that health professionals are properly remunerated to benefit nature of the sector and therefore improve attractiveness to careers and retention

These are points of departure that are fundamental to ensuring provision of human resources for health necessary to provide health services to South Africans. This plan is a measure to address health needs through provision of appropriate skills mix for the whole health system.

### 1.3.2 Consultation

In view of the assumptions made above, the department embarked on a process of developing a human resource plan, building on the Government Strategic Priorities as well as the National Health Strategic Priorities (see Figure 1).

**Figure 1**  
**Strategic Alignment of the Consultation Process**



The consultation process was essential to the development of the National Human Resource Plan, which preceded the drafting of a Strategic Framework. The workshop on 17 and 18 November 2004 represented a major milestone and served to focus the process by examining in detail the areas mentioned below.

**Action Area: Human Resource Planning****Focus Points:**

Securing Supply - (Higher Education/Foreign Health Workers/ Statutory Bodies)  
 Determining Demand - (Norms, standards and projections)  
 Implementing the Training of Mid-level Workers - (including Medical Assistants)  
 Establishing Qualified Community Health Workers

**Action Area: Human Resource Management****Focus Points:**

Performance Management (including managerial skills in HR)  
 Effective Recruitment Incentives and Retention Strategies (job evaluations)  
 Effective Financial Incentives  
 Community Service

**Action Area: Human Resource Development****Focus Points:**

Accessing and Using Skills Development Resources  
 Critical In-Service Programmes (Primary Health Care)  
 Mentoring and Career Pathing  
 Migration  
 Blurring Scopes of Practice  
 Leadership and Ethics

**Action Area: Migration – Cross Cutting Theme**

The following events and processes immediately followed this consultation process:

National Health Summit on 2nd and 3rd December 2004  
 Dialogue with Education and Training Institutions  
 Discussions with the Technical Committee of the NHC  
 Presentation to the National Health Council  
 Presentation to Cabinet

The Strategic Framework was then released for public comment in August 2005 and stakeholders called upon to submit written comments, which have now been incorporated in this plan.

**1.3.3 Key Issues Covered in The Plan**

*Scan of Policy and Legislation* – It is important to note that although a concrete Human Resource Plan for Health has not been in existence for a number of years pre- and post-1994, there are several policies and legislative measures adopted as from 1994 that serve as guidance for HRH planning, management and development. This scan was done as part of a rapid analysis of the status of various HRH issues, as proposed by the WHO Toolkit for Human Resources.

*Stewardship for Health Care* – The question of who takes responsibility for the performance of the health system is an issue firmly addressed by the World Health Organisation in its World Health Report 2000. The proposed framework addresses this issue and identifies certain activities that the Department has to carry out to ensure that government effectively fulfils this responsibility.

*Approach to Defining Norms and Standards* – Over many years it has been a practice to stipulate norms and standards at national level when dealing with human resources and other aspects of health care provision. While there is no denying that HR planning is impossible without a certain amount of standardisation and benchmarking, there has been a growing realisation of a need to develop context-sensitive workload

indicators. The drafting team took a different approach and proposed a new approach to determining staffing ratios. This was done bearing in mind the complexity of the country's health care system. The department anticipated that this would generate plenty of positive debate and possibly lead to a new, unique approach for dealing with the demands of the health workload at local delivery level.

*Major Pillars of HRH Plan* – These are areas that are deemed to form the foundation of a robust HRH Plan for South Africa and necessitate that major investments are made in these areas to ensure the long-term sustainability of planning, developing and managing human resources for health.

*National Agenda on Human Resources for Health* – This section puts forward a strategic framework that identifies guiding principles, strategic objectives and broad activities, which act as anchors of the HRH Plan. The view taken here is that the national plan should function as a reference framework that stakeholders will utilise in developing their own plans. These activities are organised in such a manner that they communicate with the national department, provincial departments, health science education institutions and private health sector bodies etc. Each of these bodies will be expected to further identify sub-activities as part of implementation and, together with the lead partners, to agree on definite timeframes for implementation of these.

This plan devotes a lot of attention to *human resource production*, i.e. the extent to which we as a country should be developing or producing health professionals in various categories. Nursing receives a strong emphasis because of the role this profession plays currently in ensuring the success of our Primary Health Care approach in making health services accessible to the nation. The need for a Strategy for Nursing in South Africa is advocated, as is, upon completion, its implementation, since one result of this national plan should be to assist in stabilising the profession. A further indication of commitment to transforming our academic institutions is the move to establish a programme for the Development of Health Sciences Academia. This has a direct bearing on our ability to produce black scientists in particular, and further to consolidate the transformation of all scientific bodies and education institutions. The funding of higher education and training is also addressed and the partnership with the national Department of Education and the Treasury is seen as critical in enabling the country to produce health professionals at least for self-sufficiency. The section dealing with the policy regarding the Foreign Health Workforce introduces certain measures to ensure that the country adopts a consistent approach to managing this area. These will also help in ensuring adherence to policy positions that are from time to time agreed to at continental and international forums. Lastly, monitoring the implementation and later the performance of this HRH Plan means that certain indicators must be developed. The last section of this plan proposes a way forward in ensuring that appropriate performance indicators are developed for human resources and the plan itself.

*The Short-term Action Plan* – This short-term action plan identifies activities that require urgent intervention. These activities are linked directly to the guiding principles and strategic objectives of the rest of the Plan. The purpose is to indicate areas where implementation is already underway to address issues that need attention even before a final plan is adopted.