

BASIC PRINCIPLES OF

HEALTH SERVICE INTEGRATION

Delivery of health care services is complex and requires a tailored approach to meet community needs. There is no one-size-fits-all model of integration that is appropriate for all organizations and communities.

The World Health Organization (WHO) describes integration as *“the management and delivery of health services so that clients receive a continuum of preventive and curative services, according to their needs over time and across different levels of the health system.”* With this in mind, decision-makers can use the following principles in the development of appropriate strategies for planning and implementing successfully integrated health care systems:

COMPREHENSIVE CARE



Integrated health systems take responsibility to plan for, provide, and coordinate all core services along the continuum of health for the population served.

These services include primary care through specialized care, as well as cooperation between health and social services to coordinate efforts across sectors.

CLIENT-FOCUSED CARE



Integrated health systems place the patient/client at the centre of their operations.

A client-focused approach encourages active participation by the client and their family or informal caregivers. Listening and responding to the needs of specific populations and communities is a key component of inclusive health care.

STANDARDIZED CARE



The use of standardized, evidence-supported protocols across health care service provider teams is an important element when providing integrated health services.

Practice guidelines are meant to standardize care across services and sites, with the aim of enhancing the quality of care.

PERFORMANCE MANAGEMENT



Integrated health systems have well-developed performance monitoring systems, including indicators to measure outcomes at different levels.

Continuous measurement of health care outcomes and reporting are fundamental parts of the quality improvement process.

INFORMATION SYSTEMS



Quality information systems strengthen communication and information flow between service providers and partner agencies.

Data management through an electronic system allows for collection, tracking, and reporting of information such as population demographics and needs, use of services, and client experience.

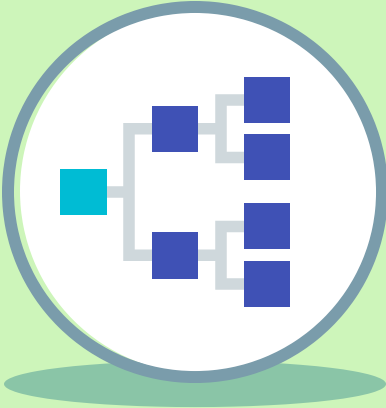
LEADERSHIP



An integrated health system calls for a clear vision for service delivery, and an organizational culture that supports the vision.

Bringing different cultures together requires dedicated leadership with clear communication processes.

GOVERNANCE



Governance should be diversified, ensuring representation from a variety of stakeholder groups. Diverse stakeholders contribute different perspectives and knowledge, and are better able to understand how health care is delivered.

Senior leadership can help to ensure consistency in service delivery that is aligned with the organization's stated vision and goals.

FINANCIAL MANAGEMENT



Financial management is often connected with performance monitoring in integrated health systems. Some systems have implemented tools that support financial and clinical decision-making at the service level.

The overall goal is to provide the most cost-effective care in the most appropriate location.

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