

In addition to expanding access to health care in the country, AKDN is committed to improving the quality of health services. Training for midwives, nurses, laboratory technicians, doctors and other medical personnel is aimed at providing the best possible health care.



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expertise in microbiology, haematology, serology and biochemistry services

The AKU Hospital in Karachi, Pakistan, will manage the 100-bed hospital and supervise its gradual expansion and eventual development into a full-service health care and medical teaching facility. To ensure that health services are accessible, the pricing for health services is subsidized. For the very poor, the FMIC has instituted a Welfare Support Programme to ensure that all Afghans can benefit from high quality health services.

Future Directions

As access and quality will remain the main areas of focus for the foreseeable future, AKDN's health care activities will emphasise training for professionals at all tiers of the system, from community health workers and laboratory technicians to nurses and doctors. Additional clinics will be added and made operational to expand coverage. Of particular note will be the application of the government's "Essential Package of Hospital Services", which will be implemented nationwide. AKDN

agencies, and in particular the Aga Khan Health Services, are expected to contribute technical expertise and other support to hospitals in several districts.

Rationalising pharmaceutical use and improving the supply will also be emphasised. Cross-border referral services, starting with the Khorog Oblast General Hospital in Khorog, Tajikistan, will be explored in the context of public-private partnerships.

Over a number of years, the FMIC hospital in Kabul is expected to become a centre of excellence for medical care and education in the country. It will work in close cooperation with the Faculty of Medicine at Kabul University, the AKU in Karachi, and with the Universities of Paris, Lyon, Toulouse and Caen in France.

In addition, the Aga Khan Agency for Microfinance is exploring the use of health micro-insurance and health care accounts to protect poor people from catastrophic loss due to illness.

For further information

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The Aga Khan Development Network (AKDN) is a group of private development agencies working to empower communities and individuals, often in disadvantaged circumstances, to improve living conditions and opportunities, especially in Africa and Asia. Its agencies work in over 30 countries for the common good of all citizens, regardless of their gender, origin or religion. Its underlying impulse is the ethic of compassion for the vulnerable in society.

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HEALTH CARE IN AFGHANISTAN



AKDN Health Care Activities in Afghanistan

Despite improvements in the last five years, health care in Afghanistan still suffers from a lack of basic infrastructure and trained personnel. Life expectancy is 41 years for men and 42 years for women. Mortality rates among mothers and children are among the highest in the world. In rural areas the situation is worse: 96 percent of all deliveries in rural communities take place outside a health facility, many without the assistance of qualified health professionals. A UN study estimates that every 30 minutes a woman in Afghanistan dies from pregnancy-related causes.

The Aga Khan Development Network (AKDN) is working with the Afghan Government to help improve health care in the country. At the end of 2005, AKDN's non-profit health initiatives included 119 Health Posts, each with two Community Health Workers, as well as 17 Basic Health Centres, five Community Health Centres and one Hospital (in Bamyan). The operation of health facilities has im-

proved access to quality health services to more than 360,000 people in some of Afghanistan's most isolated areas. In addition, surveys show that AKDN's related water and sanitation interventions have reduced child mortality and morbidity by half within a year in a population of nearly 200,000 people.

Perhaps the greatest challenge has been staffing and equipping these and other facilities. In many areas, there is only one doctor for every 50,000 inhabitants. Over 90 percent of private pharmaceutical outlets have only five essential drugs in stock. Many midwife training programmes were dormant for 10 years.

To address these issues, the AKDN is working with the Afghanistan Government and partners to upgrade nursing and midwife programmes. Components of these training programmes are taught by the Aga Khan University (AKU), in Kabul and Karachi. AKU also has offered refresher courses for Afghan nurses and

doctors at its teaching hospital in Karachi.

Water and Sanitation

To address one of the most important health issues in Afghanistan – water and sanitation – the AKDN has constructed more than 1,000 wells and built or reconstructed more than 30 drinking water supply systems. The initial aim was to decrease the incidence of diarrhoeal disease, especially for children under five.

The longer-term objectives include ensuring regular supplies of safe drinking water through the construction of reservoirs, small pumping stations and piped water systems. This objective is especially important to women, many of whom must walk several kilometres to fetch water. By creating systems that are simple to maintain, the programme enables communities to manage the supply infrastructure. Other objectives

His Highness the Aga Khan congratulating recent nursing graduates at the Bamyan Hospital. AKDN runs a variety of training programmes for community midwives and nurses in Bamyan, Faizabad and Kabul. The objective of the programmes is to address the need for local, female, qualified health professionals in rural areas.



include proper sanitation, hygienic waste disposal and improved health practices. Programmes start only after discussion with village communities. AKDN provides the initial materials and technical advice. The community contributes labour for construction and signs an undertaking for maintenance, for which training is also provided. Pre- and post-implementation surveys have shown that AKDN's water and sanitation interventions reduced child mortality and morbidity by 50 percent in a one-year period.

Health Care Infrastructure

Many health care facilities were damaged in the wars of the last quarter century, and needed to be restored, but there were also many locations which had never had formal health care. In 2002, AKDN began a programme to focus on building a health care delivery system. This system included the construction of basic health centres – often in locations which had never had such a facility. The work, organised by the shura, the village council, and supported by the Aga Khan Foundation, is carried out by village labourers. Most of the centres consist of two observation or treatment rooms, a training room, pharmacy, laboratory, kitchen, a residence for staff, a pit latrine and bathroom.

The Basic Health Centres are only one component of a four-tiered approach. In the first tier, Community Health Workers, who are volunteers working out of Health Posts, are trained to provide health education, administer and advise on treatment for minor ailments and identify diseases for referral to

Basic Health Centres, the second tier, which offer essential curative care and comprehensive maternal and child health care. A third tier of Comprehensive Health Centres offers basic health care and includes diagnostic, treatment and referral services, in addition to emergency obstetric care.

Referral Hospitals, the fourth tier, are similar to District/ Provincial Hospitals and offer referral and secondary care and other specialist services including obstetrics/gynaecology, surgery, paediatrics and general medicine. One of these referral hospitals, the Bamyan hospital, is managed by the Aga Khan Health Services. Since 2003, AKDN has managed the Bamyan District Hospital, which serves as a referral unit for the seven districts in the province. The hospital has seen a steady increase in patient visits. In-hospital deliveries, for example, doubled in 2005.

The facility will soon offer an expanded range of services, adding a blood bank, emergency room, dentistry and physiotherapy services to existing services in internal medicine, general surgery, obstetrics and gynaecology, and paediatrics.

In addition, AKDN has refurbished a number of facilities, including health centres which had been damaged or neglected. AKU has also contributed to the revitalisation of national institutions, such as the Government's Institute of Health Sciences (IHS). Among other institution-strengthening activities, AKDN has set up a science laboratory at IHS and assisted with a revision of the pre-

Soviet curriculum, English language skills and computer training.

Training

One of Afghanistan's greatest challenges is the lack of trained personnel. The combination of the emigration of trained personnel, nearly 25 years of war and a lack of technical training, especially in the health care field, has left the ranks of qualified medical personnel severely decimated. Many training programmes, particularly for midwives and nurses, did not operate for up to ten years. In addition, tradition prevented women from seeking treatment from male doctors, exacerbating the state of women's health.

Training – and particularly training for women health care providers – therefore plays an important part in improving the quality of, and accessibility to, health care. To expand the number of health care workers and to assist health professionals update their knowledge and skills, AKDN agencies run a number of training and re-training programmes. They run community midwifery schools in Bamyan, Faizabad and Kabul to address a major need for qualified, local, female health professionals in rural areas. The University has also provided postgraduate medical education to Afghan physicians enrolled in residency programmes at AKU in Karachi.

Maternal and Child Health

An important milestone was reached in August 2003 when 21 midwifery residency students, the first cohort in

over 10 years, graduated from Kabul's Institute of Health Sciences. The overall programme, which is supported by AKU, is on track to graduate 1,000 midwives and nurses by the end of 2006.

AKDN's partnership with the Ministry of Public Health and with faculty from the Government's Institute of Health Sciences has also been an important collaboration for nursing and midwifery education in the country. In January 2005, the Government endorsed AKDN's revisions to Afghanistan's nursing curriculum. The new curriculum, which meets international standards, has been adopted throughout the country. Its aim is to produce better qualified nursing graduates.

In line with the focus on improving mother and child health, the collaboration between the Government of Afghanistan, the Government of France, AKDN and two French NGOs, *La Chaîne de L'Espoir* and *Enfants Afghans*, to manage and operate the French Medical Institute for Children (FMIC) in Kabul represents another milestone in the recovery of Afghanistan's health care system. Completed in 2005, the FMIC offers in-patient and out-patient services in, among other services, paediatric medicine and surgery, cardiology, and orthopaedics. The Institute is one of few facilities in Afghanistan offering screening and diagnosis in a range of radiology services. Equipped to international standards, the hospital provides state-of-the-art medical and surgical techniques. Its laboratory, affiliated with the AKU Hospital in Karachi, has already developed

Cover Photo:

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