

## Saudi Health Care System a Review

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### ABSTRACT

Saudi Arabia as many countries fight to deliver best possible quality and cost-effective healthcare services to their people. The general health of the Saudi population has greatly improved in recent years. however, it does face a variety of complex mid-to long-term challenges. Though, a number of issues pose challenges to the health care system, such the health ministry's various roles, limited financial resources, changing patterns of disease etc... The Saudi Arabian government has committed huge resources to improve health care, with the ultimate goal of providing free and accessible healthcare services for every Saudi citizen and expatriate working within the public sector. Therefore, this review will focus on health care system in Saudi Arabia from general view and the challenges opposing the Saudi health care system.

**Keywords:** Health Care System in Saudi Arabia, Oil Economy, Saudi Arabia, Health Care

### Introduction

Many people do not have access to adequate healthcare. This occurs widely enough in third-world countries. Healthcare professionals, institutions, and governments face controversial choices about providing adequate healthcare.

Health care access is the ability to obtain healthcare services such as prevention, diagnosis, treatment, and management of diseases, illness, disorders, and other health-impacting conditions [1].

Saudi Arabia is a country in the Middle East and Neighbouring countries include Iraq, Jordan, Kuwait, Oman, Qatar, United Arab Emirates, and Yemen. The geography of Saudi Arabia is primarily desert with mountains in the southwest. The government system is a kingdom. Saudi Arabia has one of the world's largest oil reserves, although the share of the non-oil economy is growing recently Saudi Arabia is one of the richest and fastest growing countries in the Middle East. It is the world's largest producer and exporter of oil [2]. The population of Saudi Arabia has expanded rapidly in the past few decades from approximately 7.3 million people in 1975 to approximately 34.110.821 million in 2021[3].

A sequence of development plans in Saudi Arabia has established the infra-structure for the expansion of health services all over the country and it's developed to provide for the growing population. Fast development in medical education and the training of future Saudi health manpower have also taken place.

Health care services in Saudi Arabia have been given priority by the government. During the past few decades, health and health services have improved greatly in terms of quantity and quality [4]. also, healthcare in Saudi Arabia currently is proved free of charge to all Saudi citizens and expatriates working in the public sector, primarily through the Ministry of Health (MOH) and enlarged by other governmental health facilities. Governmental funding is allocated through annual budgets to individual ministries and programs.

The Saudi ministry of health has served the role of the chief governmental health coordinator. The MOH has a broad scope of regulatory powers. These include quality of services, and setting prices. It also distributes the budgets for each hospital through each regional health directorate. The Saudi MOH lacks authority over two important public sector health systems. The university teaching hospitals and the military hospitals fall outside of their purview. Also, the MOH exerts only indirect control over the growing private sector and its sets maximum charges for pharmaceutical drugs [5].

University hospitals are directly under the Ministry of Education and receive direct financial allocations from the Ministry of Finance. The military hospitals, the National Guard, Armed Forces, and Interior hospitals are directly governed and funded through their respective ministry budgets and can be seen as competitors for healthcare budget allocations to the MOH. This allows for wide variation in funding levels and personnel policies. For example, the funds allocated per bed are significantly higher in the non-MOH hospitals. These facts create the perception that service quality, ease of access, and technology is much higher in non-MOH hospitals.

### Levels of Health Care Services in Saudi Arabia

There are four levels of health care services in Saudi Arabia: primary, secondary, tertiary and quaternary. Primary health care is the first level of health care services and it is provided by the Ministry of Health through a network of primary health care centres. Secondary Care, if a condition cannot be managed by primary health care services, it's referred to examination by someone with more specialized expertise. Specialists focus on specific body systems, diseases or conditions. For example, cardiologists are experts in the heart and its pumping system. Tertiary Care, if a patient is hospitalized and requires a higher level of specialty care, he or she may be referred to tertiary care. Tertiary care requires highly specialized equipment and expertise such as neurosurgery, neonatology and any other very complex treatments or procedures. Quaternary Care is even more specialized. Examples would be experimental medicine and procedures, and very rare, specialized surgeries [6].

### Health Insurance in Saudi Arabia

A major change in the funding of healthcare in Saudi Arabia began with the introduction of health insurance. In 2002, the Health Insurance Council was formed, with the charge of guiding the introduction of mandatory health insurance that was to be implemented in various, gradual phases. The first phase required employers of more than 500 employees to pay for insurance coverage for non-Saudi workers and their dependent family members. The second phase applied to companies with more than 100 employees. The third phase included coverage of all employers and their employees. The government now plans to implement insurance coverage for all Saudi citizens, before they privatize state-owned hospitals [5].

### Digital Health in Saudi Arabia

Digital health is one of the most essential transformation programs operated by the Ministry of Health. The program aims to improve general health by providing better health care services and raising the value of health care. The Ministry of Health has worked to develop a clear and concise strategy and plan to achieve these goals in alignment with the strategic objectives of the Kingdom's Vision 2030. The system focuses on telehealth, cyber security, and advanced functionality including Artificial Intelligence, analytics and models of care. The aim of the digital health care system is to transform the delivery of healthcare through the expansion of implementation of technology, in order to deliver safer and efficient healthcare services to the society of the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia [7].

### Health Care During Hajj

Every year, the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia hosts the Hajj pilgrimage, which is the largest mass gathering in the world held on a recurrent annual basis. The Hajj occurs annually from the eighth to the 12th of Dhul al-Hijah, the last 12th month of the Islamic calendar, and two to three million people perform the pilgrimage during this period. A further more than seven million complete a mini pilgrimage, known as Umrah, outside the Hajj period throughout the year. Pilgrims participate in religious activities in the holy cities of Mecca and Medina. A network of hospitals and health centers that have been established for this purpose, in addition to hospitals and centers operating throughout the year. The Ministry also provides a range of

different treatment services as well as minor and critical surgeries, inpatient services, and pharmacological vaccines for pilgrims.

### Future Health Care Challenges

The struggle to provide acceptable quality healthcare for a nation's population at an affordable cost is a challenge for any nation. The Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, as with many nations, is seeking to reconfigure its existing healthcare system to improve the quality of care its citizens receive and control the difficult and rising costs [7].

### Examples of Some of the Challenges Facing the Saudi Health Care System

- **Rising Health Care Costs:** Healthcare costs have risen dramatically around the world over the past several decades.
- **Growing numbers of elderly people:** Adults over age 65 have different healthcare needs than children and younger adults because they may have multiple chronic health problems such as diabetes, heart disease, arthritis, depression and they need specific treatments and medical care, setting them apart from the rest of the population. In 2020, life expectancy for Saudi Arabia was 75.3 years. Life expectancy of Saudi Arabia increased from 53.8 years in 1971 to 75.3 years in 2020 growing at an average annual rate of 0.69% [8]. Older adults not only rely on their primary care physician, but also on long-term care services and supports. Teams of physicians, long-term care assistants, nurses, social workers, and family caregivers often work together to provide tailored and coordinated care to older adults.
- **The Uninsured People:** Having no health insurance also often means that people will postpone necessary care and routine check-up. Usually, the uninsured usually have no regular doctor and limited access to their medications. In 2018, almost half of the government employed individuals were uninsured while only 15% of the private sector employed individuals did not have health insurance and less than one quarter of the self-employed and the unemployed did not have health insurance [9].
- **New Technologies:** Many health care institutions are slow to adopt new technology, due to concerns about cost and lack of familiarity with the technology.
- **New and re-emerging Infectious Diseases:** in today's world, emerging and re-emerging diseases are having a significant impact on global economies and public health [10].
- **Life style related Health Issues:** unhealthy life style involving tobacco use, a lack of regular physical activity, and consumption of diets rich in highly saturated fats, sugars, and salt. This lifestyle result in higher levels of risk factors, such as hypertension, dyslipidemia, diabetes, and obesity that act independently and synergistically [11].

### Special Health Care System Challenges During Hajj

Mass gathering in religious events face important public health challenges like the transmission of infectious diseases, exacerbation of non-communicable diseases, and disorders related to climate change. The prevention and management of threats to global health security and protecting the health and lives of pilgrims requires effective cooperation between numerous agencies within and outside the Saudi Arabia, for

example between agencies responsible for health, transport, border control, and environmental health [12].

### Mass Gathering Medicine in Saudi Arabia

A mass gathering is defined by world health organization WHO as a planned or spontaneous event that gathers extensive numbers of attendees who might strain the health planning and response capacities of the host community, city, or country [13]. Mass gatherings can present important public health challenges related to the health of attendees and of the host country population and health services. The concept of mass gathering medicine as a specialty emanated from discourse on the 2009 Hajj, which was held during the 2009 H1N1 influenza pandemic. The first International Conference on Mass Gatherings Medicine was held in Jeddah, Saudi Arabia, in October, 2010. This conference led to a coalition of experts from virtual WHO mass gathering collaborating centres and global academic and public health faculty to guide development of, and update, optimal public health and medical prevention and treatment guidelines at mass gathering events [14].

### Conclusion

The Saudi Arabian government has committed huge resources to improve health care, with the ultimate goal of providing free and accessible healthcare services for every Saudi citizen and expatriate working within the public sector.

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