Joint Learning Network for Universal Health Coverage

Health need

Globally, countries are expanding health coverage to more of their citizens through the development of national health coverage plans. Policies, implementation challenges, technologies, and models of universal health coverage programs vary from country to country. Yet, one challenge all systems face is the fundamental need for consistent data exchange. Without it, health care providers, insurers, government agencies, and other stakeholders are unable to communicate effectively, which can lead to poor customer care, inadequate financial management, and a system that fails to respond to the needs of a nation. But information systems are costly investments that all too often do not meet user needs due to inadequate identification of functional requirements, lack of interoperability between systems, or poor vendor choice.

Technology solution

The Joint Learning Network (JLN) for Universal Health Coverage is an innovative learning community where practitioners and policymakers from around the globe co-develop knowledge that focuses on the practical "how to" of achieving universal health coverage. PATH and our partner PharmAccess Foundation have facilitated the Information Technology (IT) Initiative of the JLN since December 2010. We work directly with ministries of health and national health insurers to foster peer-to-peer learning and to develop and share artifacts, knowledge, and tools that can be used by countries to accelerate the development of national health insurance information solutions. One such tool is openHDD—a collaborative, web-based, open-source tool for creating health data dictionaries (HDDs). HDDs enable communication among people and information systems by promoting consistent, accurate, and systematic data definitions required to support system interoperability.

Current status and results

PATH and PharmAccess have worked collaboratively with JLN-member countries (currently Ghana, India, Indonesia, Kenya, Malaysia, Mali, Nigeria, the Philippines, and Vietnam) to develop common enterprise architecture products and guidance that can be used by any country developing their national health insurance information systems. We have demonstrated that multiple countries with disparate health systems and differing approaches to financing health care services still have common requirements for basic insurance processes such as enrolling members, contracting with providers, and paying claims. Providing a common starting point enables countries to accelerate the time and decrease the cost of developing solutions from scratch. For example, the openHDD tool contains several countries' health data dictionaries available to be used as a starting point for other countries. An existing dictionary can be copied and adapted to create a new, country-specific dictionary. Our next steps are focused on facilitating the IT technical collaboration team by hosting events and webinars, providing support for countries to adapt and use JLN tools, developing local health informatics leaders, and creating a long-term sustainability plan for the network.

The JLN creates common solutions through peer-to-peer collaboration.

Results for Development/Nkem Wellington

"We had to do things on our own, learning by doing. But when we start connecting with people and we start diving into details of how to do things—enrollment, registration, IT, provider payment—then it's critical to have this exchange with other people and get to know how did they do it."

Sam Adjei, Executive Director at Centre for Health and Social Services Ltd, Ghana

Availability

For more information regarding this project, contact Breese Arenth at barenth@path.org or visit http://jointlearningnetwork.org/content/information-technology.

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