



MINISTRY OF HEALTH

KENYA HEALTH SECTOR REFERRAL IMPLEMENTATION GUIDELINES

The Constitution of Kenya guarantees all citizens the right to the highest attainable standard of health. To that end, the Kenyan government is dedicated to strengthen the health referral mechanisms that will ensure the continuity of care across the different levels of care within the Kenyan health system. The referral system ensures that patients' health needs are taken care of using resources that are beyond those available where they access care.

The Kenya Health Sector Referral Implementation Guidelines is a document that will guide health workers on appropriate referral processes and outlines the roles and responsibilities of the various stakeholders in the referral process. The document was put together with the understanding that most of Kenya's health facilities and health workers are concentrated in urban areas, which in turn creates a challenge to the provision of equitable access to comprehensive healthcare for the entire population. By creating a harmonized, effective referral system, the government will ensure that care is provided at the minimum possible cost, all the while promoting universal coverage for all citizens, safeguarding continuity of health services across different levels of care, and ensuring efficient collaboration and coordination amongst health facilities at both the national and county levels.

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The Referral guidelines take into account the six levels of care in Kenya. These levels are:

- 1. Community Health Services (Level 1):** This level lies at the foundation of the health delivery system, and comprises of community health services.
- 2. Primary Care Services (level 2 and level 3):** These levels of care include facilities such as dispensaries, health centers, maternity and nursing homes.
- 3. County Referral Services (level 4 and level 5):** These facilities are managed by any given county and include hospitals that offer a broad spectrum of treatment, and whose services complement the work of primary care facilities.
- 4. National Referral Services (level 6):** These facilities offer specialized health care services including national referral hospitals, laboratories, blood banks and research facilities.

The referral guidelines are intended for use by all state and non-state health stakeholders in the country, including health management teams at the national and county level, besides all healthcare facilities, whether they are public, private or faith-based institutions. Within the guidelines, all key stakeholders have a key set of priorities, duties and responsibilities, which eventually work to harmonize the effectiveness of the referral process.

Leading these stakeholders is the Ministry of Health at the national level, which is expected to formulate policies, strategies and guidelines that address the gaps within the referral system; provide technical assistance to counties on how best to strengthen referral systems; and undertake overall performance monitoring of the entire system. County governments are also expected to ensure collaboration between service providers in any given county; guarantee the availability of adequate human and financial resources to support the referral system; besides developing the necessary infrastructure to support the county referral framework.

Referring and receiving health facilities and health workers also form an important component in the referral chain. These health workers are responsible for the continuous monitoring of the process of referral within the facilities, and to undertake corrective measures whenever deemed necessary. Facilities should also keep directories of health services and facilities within defined geographic areas; ensure staff are trained on the referral process; provide guidance to families and obtain informed consent from the patient being referred; respond promptly to consultation requests, and share all pertinent findings and recommendations to the referring health worker or facility. The guidelines also provide guidance to the health workers on the referral process, including referral documentation, communication and feedback to both the clients and the referring services.

Collectively, the Health Sector Referral Guidelines are meant to create proper linkages between health institutions on different levels at both county and national levels, hence improving the capacity of health workers to manage the referral system and improve access to care for all Kenyans. A well-functioning referral system will ensure rational use of health services, improved continuity of care for patients, cost-effectiveness in health care provision, improved access and equity in access to care, and finally improved health outcomes for the whole country.



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