



Using Regulatory Levers to Strengthen the Health Professional Workforce in Cambodia

Cambodia, like many low- and middle-income countries, has had in place a legislative framework for regulation of health professionals based on overarching laws: the “*Management of private medical, paramedical and medical aid profession*” (2000) and the “*Law on pharmaceutical management*” (1996) and its subsequent amendment (2007). There are five health profession councils in Cambodia, each established by a Royal Decree: the Medical Council of Cambodia (MCC in 2000), the Dental Council of Cambodia (DCC in 2005), the Cambodian Midwives Council (CMC in 2006), the Cambodian Council of Nurses (CCN in 2007), and the Pharmacy Council of Cambodia (PCC in 2010). Under these laws are a number of legal instruments, including Sub-decrees with a code of ethics for each profession and prakas (ministerial regulations) establishing a range of directives for each profession.

Under Cambodia’s legislative framework, national Councils are responsible for establishing the requirements for registration of their profession, which are then assessed and determined in the 25 provinces by members of the Provincial Council for entry onto each Council’s Register.

The Royal Government of Cambodia through the Ministry of Health (MOH) recognized that the current regulatory



Physician trying the new on-line registration application form and process with guidance from a staff member of the Medical Council of Cambodia. Photo: Bun Mao, URC.

system is not “fit for purpose”. It provided only limited scope, powers, structure and capacity for regulating health professionals in the Cambodian context, and it did not adequately deal with the regulation of health professionals working in a variety of different health services. Second, there were no effective mechanisms to assure safety and quality of the care that patients receive from all health professionals in Cambodia. The existing Councils had limited legal authority to require and assure existing

health profession standards and improve these standards over time. Finally, the current system did not adequately support the Government’s objectives for improving health care quality and access to care and for meeting its international obligations to the Association of South East Asian Nations (ASEAN) in the area of health profession regulation.

Technical Support for Health Workforce Regulation in Cambodia

In February 2014, the United States Agency for International Development (USAID) Mission in Cambodia requested support from the USAID Applying Science to Strengthen and Improve Systems (ASSIST) Project to work with the MOH to strengthen health profession regulation. While the original request related only to the work of the Medical Council of Cambodia, on further discussion, it was agreed that a health systems approach that aimed to holistically strengthen the overall health professions’ regulatory system of all five independent Councils—the MCC, DCC, CMC, CCN and PCC—would best meet the country’s needs for ensuring that all health professionals meet minimum standards for competence and professional conduct for the provision of safe, ethical, and effective care.

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To inform an appropriate activity design that would meet priorities set by Cambodian stakeholders, ASSIST worked with the MOH and the five Councils to carry out a rapid baseline assessment on the status of health profession regulation. The findings were used in a structured consultative process with all key stakeholders in October 2014 to identify strengths and weaknesses and to set strategic priorities for improvement. This resulted in the development of the Health Profession Councils' National Strategic Plan 2015-2020, which was officially launched by the Minister of Health on June 8, 2015.

The five-year strategic plan prioritizes the Councils' strategies and timeframes relating to four key regulatory functions: 1) Legislation; 2) Organizational and internal governance; 3) External governance and public accountability; and 4) Responsibilities and functions.

ASSIST provided guidance to the Councils and MOH to draft a new law, *Regulation of Health Practitioners*, and supported its passage through the Cambodian parliamentary process. To support the implementation of the law, ASSIST worked with the five Councils to develop an effective governance and organizational structure through the establishment of a new health profession Councils' Joint Secretariat that will enable them to maintain effective and efficient business and regulatory systems and processes. ASSIST also supported the development of an on-line registration application process and web-based registrant management system for use by all five Councils and developed a comprehensive communications strategy for the Councils to help raise awareness and understanding of health professional registration among health professionals, employers, education institutions, and the general public.

Key Accomplishments

- **Enactment of the Law on Regulation of Health Practitioners (LHRP) on November 22, 2016.** The new law introduced new requirements for registration for life as a health professional; new requirements for an initial and renewable license to practice as a health practitioner; penalties for those persons who are not a registered health professional yet practice the profession and for those who practice their profession without a license to practice; and investigation of complaints into the professional competence and/or conduct of individual practitioners with the authority to apply disciplinary sanctions or protective actions to protect the public from harm.
- **Identification, prioritization, and drafting of amendments to subsequent legal instruments.** To align with the requirements of the new law, amendments to the five health profession Councils' Royal Decrees, Sub-decrees, and prakas were identified and prioritized for action. A comparative study on selected ASEAN and western countries' legal frameworks was undertaken to develop a template Royal Decree for each health profession Council that meets the new LHRP and contemporary regulatory practice.
- **Promotion of the new law and its requirements among the Councils.** ASSIST sponsored Council-led dissemination workshops on the new law for four of the five Councils in December 2016 with participation of 240 members from the national, regional, and provincial Councils. The Dental Council independently delivered a separate dissemination workshop on the new law to its national and sub-national Council members.
- **Creation of the Coordinating Committee of Health Profession Councils (CCHPC).** The Minister of

Health established the CCHPC in accordance with the new law on Jan 20, 2017. The appointed members include MOH staff and health profession Council Presidents. The CCHPC is responsible for coordinating mechanisms and organizing procedures to help the Councils fulfill their roles and responsibilities in accordance with the LHRP.

- **Developed the Business Plan for the health profession Councils' Joint Secretariat.** This included development of nine staff position descriptions, recruitment and the funding of five of the nine positions and design of a governance structure through the roles and responsibilities of an Executive Committee of the Joint Secretariat.
- **Developed online registration application forms and process with a Registrant Management System (RMS) for implementation on March 21, 2018.** Together with local IT developer firm, Code's Done, ASSIST conducted regional workshops to train 255 members and staff from all five Councils across the 25 provinces (Aug–Sept 2017). These workshops covered: how to complete the new online application for registration by Cambodian nationals; new registration application process, including registration fee payment; and new web-based RMS for all health profession Councils.

Resources Available

- [Cambodia page on ASSIST website with annual reports](#)
- [Strengthening health professions regulation in Cambodia: a rapid assessment.](#)
- [Health Profession Councils National Strategic Plan 2015–2020](#)
- [Baseline Assessment of Cambodia Health Professions Regulatory System](#)