

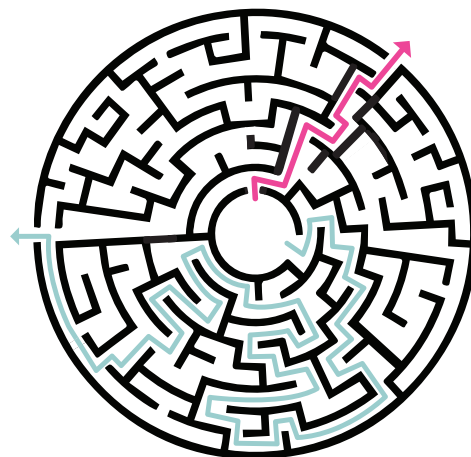
# BETTER DATA FOR STRONGER HEALTH SYSTEMS

In this installment of our health systems strengthening insights series, we explore long-term solutions that enable sustained integration of private sector data into national systems and empower decision-makers to leverage high quality data for policy making, service delivery and disease surveillance.

In the ever-evolving health landscape, a robust health management information system (HMIS) stands as a cornerstone of a strong health system. It not only guides decision-making and resource allocation but also shapes the well-being of individuals and communities. However, despite technological advancements that have revolutionized data collection, analytics, and visualization, health systems in low- and middle-income countries (LMICs) continue to grapple with a fundamental challenge: fragmented data and limited effective data use for decision-making.

## THE PUZZLE OF FRAGMENTED DATA

Imagine a puzzle where each piece represents a fragment of health information stored in a separate database, each using different codes and names to refer to the same thing. These data silos limit our ability to gain a comprehensive understanding of consumers' health needs, preferences, and bottlenecks within the health system—vital for effective decision-making. Additionally, the lack of access to the right data, poor data quality, and limited data analysis and interpretation skills, particularly at the sub-national level, further impede data use.



## THE MISSING PIECE: PRIVATE HEALTH SECTOR DATA

In a mixed health system where the private sector plays a significant role in delivering essential health services and products, a crucial piece of the puzzle is often missing: comprehensive, timely, up-to-date, and high-quality data from the private health sector. LMICs are increasingly turning to digital solutions to collect data from private health providers. However, fully leveraging routine reporting from these providers remains a challenge, and essential insights into the private sector's scope, scale, and quality are often lacking.

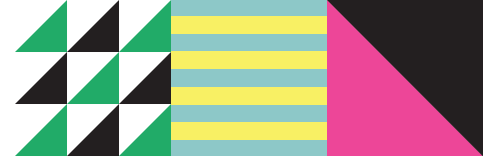
Working toward universal health coverage (UHC) means ensuring that everyone, regardless of income or location, has access to the affordable, quality healthcare they need, when and where they need it. Yet, without comprehensive and high-quality data from the private sector, progress toward UHC is hard to gauge, making its realization even more challenging.

## CONNECTING THE PIECES

### ADDRESSING FRAGMENTATION OF INFORMATION SYSTEMS AND ENHANCING DATA USE

Several promising solutions can help overcome challenges relating to data fragmentation and use. Examples include:

- The World Health Organization's recent endorsement of the Fast Healthcare Interoperability Resources (FHIR) standard as part of its SMART



(Standards-based, Machine Readable, Adaptive, Requirements-based, Testable) guidelines, for example, may be a game-changer when it comes to addressing the issue of fragmented information systems. The FHIR standard describes how to collect, store, use, exchange, and distribute patient and health data regardless of the application used.

- User-centered design approaches, such as PSI's Data to Action (D2A) framework, can engage decision makers and improve data utilization. The D2A framework identifies the decisions that different stakeholders at various levels need to make and the corresponding data required to inform those decisions. It fosters a culture of data demand and utilization at all levels of the health system, including among frontline workers at the last mile of the health system.

## ADVANCING PRIVATE SECTOR DATA INTEGRATION

Achieving comprehensive and timely data submission from the private sector necessitates a multifaceted approach, including:

1. **Effective regulation and enforcement:** Passing effective regulation and enhancing its enforcement are critical steps.
2. **Strong partnerships and dialogue:** Building strong partnerships between the private and public sectors to enable dialogue and private sector engagement on HMIS decisions is key for successful data integration.
3. **Data quality and trust:** Enhancing data quality and establishing trust in private sector data are foundational elements. Moreover, building trust between both sectors will be imperative for fostering effective collaboration and engagement within mixed health systems.
4. **Introducing the right incentives:** Incentives play a pivotal role in catalyzing private sector engagement and data reporting, with health financing serving as a powerful lever.

5. **Leverage user-friendly reporting systems based on providers' needs and preferences:** The success of data reporting initiatives also relies on the user-friendliness of reporting systems.

## TAILORING SOLUTIONS TO PRIVATE SECTOR HETEROGENEITY

When developing these solutions and interventions, it is vital to acknowledge the vast heterogeneity of the private sector. The private sector in LMICs is complex, comprising a diverse range of providers, which, in addition to public and private healthcare facilities, also include drug shops, informal providers, frontline workers, pharmacies, and other types of outlets, each with varying levels of technical capacity, motivations, and resources to engage in data reporting. In light of this complexity, support and incentives to advance reporting must be tailored to each country's unique context, including the existing regulatory and governance framework, and infrastructural development.

## MOVING FORWARD FOR SUSTAINED IMPACT

Further investments will be needed in long-term solutions that enable the sustained integration of private sector data into national systems and in solutions that demonstrate efficacy and lasting effect on HMIS that are not health area specific, and that empower decision-makers to leverage high quality data for policy making, service delivery and disease surveillance, ultimately enhancing both access to and quality of care for consumers.

## JOIN US

In exploring how enhancing data reporting from the private sector and addressing data fragmentation can accelerate the journey toward UHC.

To learn more, read our technical briefs on [advancing private sector reporting](#) and [data fragmentation and use](#). Also, view our [short interviews](#), which are all part of our [HSS Insight series](#).