

Health care, or **healthcare**, is the prevention, treatment, and management of illness and the preservation of mental and physical well being through the services offered by the [medical](#), [nursing](#), and [allied health](#) professions. According to the [World Health Organisation](#), health care embraces all the goods and services designed to promote health, including “preventive, curative and palliative interventions, whether directed to individuals or to populations”.^[1] The organised provision of such services may constitute a [health care system](#). This can include a specific governmental organisation such as, in the UK, the [National Health Service](#) or a cooperation across the National Health Service and Social Services as in [Shared Care](#). Before the term "health care" became popular, English-speakers referred to [medicine](#) or to the [health sector](#) and spoke of the treatment and prevention of [illness](#) and [disease](#).

In most developed countries and many developing countries health care is provided to everyone regardless of their ability to pay. The [National Health Service](#) in the [United Kingdom](#) was the world's first [universal health care](#) system provided by government. It was established in 1948 by [Clement Atlee's Labour](#) government. Alternatively, compulsory government funded health insurance with nominal fees can be provided, as with Italy, which, according to the [World Health Organisation](#), has the second-best health system in the world.^[2] Other examples are [Medicare](#) in Australia, established in the 1970s by the [Labor](#) government, and by the same name [Medicare](#) in Canada, established between 1966 and 1984. Universal health care contrasts to the systems like [health care in the United States](#) or [South Africa](#), though South Africa is one of the many countries attempting [health care reform](#).^[3]

Industry

Main article: [Health care industry](#)

The **health care** industry is considered an [industry](#) or [profession](#) which includes peoples exercise of [skill](#) or judgment or the providing of a service related to the [preservation](#) or improvement of the [health](#) of individuals or the treatment or care of individuals who are injured, sick, disabled, or infirm. The delivery of modern health care depends on an expanding group of trained [professionals](#) coming together as an [interdisciplinary team](#).^{[4][5]}

The health care industry is one of the world's largest and fastest-growing industries.^[6] Consuming over 10 percent of [gross domestic product](#) of most developed nations, health care can form an enormous part of a country's [economy](#). In 2003, health care costs paid to [hospitals](#), [physicians](#), [nursing homes](#), [diagnostic](#) laboratories, [pharmacies](#), [medical device](#) manufacturers and other components of the health care system, consumed 15.3 percent^[7] of the [GDP](#) of the [United States](#), the largest of any country in the world. For the United States, the health share of gross domestic product (GDP) is expected to hold steady in 2006 before resuming its historical upward trend, reaching 19.6 percent of GDP by 2016. ^[8] In 2001, for the [OECD](#) countries the average was 8.4 percent ^[9] with the [United States](#) (13.9%), [Switzerland](#) (10.9%), and [Germany](#) (10.7%) being the top three.

Systems

Main article: [Health care systems](#)

See also: [Medical model](#), [Preventive medicine](#), and [Social medicine](#)

Purely *private enterprise* health care systems are comparatively rare. Where they exist, it is usually for a comparatively well-off subpopulation in a poorer country with a poorer standard of health

care—for instance, private clinics for a small, wealthy expatriate population in an otherwise poor country. But there are countries with a majority-private health care system with residual public service (see [Medicare](#), [Medicaid](#)). The other major models are public insurance systems. A [Social security](#) health care model is where workers and their families are insured by the State. A [Publicly funded health care](#) model is where the [residents](#) of the country are insured by the State. Within this branch is [Single-payer health care](#), which describes a type of financing system in which a single entity, typically a government run organisation, acts as the administrator (or "payer") to collect all health care fees, and pay out all health care costs.^[10] Some advocates of universal health care assert that single-payer systems save money that could be used directly towards health care by reducing administrative waste.^[10] In practice this means that the government collects taxes from the public, businesses, etc., creates an entity to administer the supply of health care and then pays health care professionals. Harry Wachtel estimate a single payer universal healthcare system will actually save money through reduced bureaucratic administration costs.^[11] [Social health insurance](#) is where the whole population or most of the population is a member of a sickness insurance company. Most health services are provided by private enterprises which act as contractors, billing the government for patient care.^[12] In almost every country with a government health care system a parallel private system is allowed to operate. This is sometimes referred to as [two-tier health care](#). The scale, extent, and funding of these private systems is very variable.

A traditional view is that improvements in health result from advancements in [medical](#) science. The [medical model](#) of health focuses on the eradication of [illness](#) through [diagnosis](#) and effective treatment. In contrast, the social model of health places emphasis on changes that can be made in society and in people's own lifestyles to make the population healthier. It defines *illness* from the point of view of the individual's functioning within their society rather than by monitoring for changes in [biological](#) or [physiological](#) signs.

World Health Organization

Main article: [World Health Organization](#)

See also: [Global health](#)

The Flag of the World Health Organization

The World Health Organization (WHO) is a specialised [United Nations](#) agency which acts as a coordinator and researcher for [public health](#) around the world. Established on [7 April 1948](#), and headquartered in [Geneva, Switzerland](#), the agency inherited the mandate and resources of its predecessor, the Health Organization, which had been an agency of the [League of Nations](#). The WHO's constitution states that its mission "is the attainment by all peoples of the highest possible level of health." Its major task is to combat disease, especially key infectious diseases, and to promote the general health of the peoples of the world. Examples of its work include years of fighting [smallpox](#). In 1979 the WHO declared that the disease had been eradicated - the first disease in history to be completely eliminated by deliberate human design. The WHO is nearing success in developing vaccines against [malaria](#) and [schistosomiasis](#) and aims to eradicate [polio](#) within the next few years. The organization has already endorsed the world's first official HIV/AIDS Toolkit for [Zimbabwe](#) from [October 3, 2006](#), making it an international standard.^[14]

The WHO is financed by contributions from member states and from donors. In recent years the WHO's work has involved more collaboration, currently around 80 such partnerships, with [NGOs](#) and the [pharmaceutical industry](#), as well as with foundations such as the [Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation](#) and the [Rockefeller Foundation](#). Voluntary contributions to the WHO from national and local governments, foundations and NGOs, other UN organizations, and the private sector (including pharmaceutical companies), now exceed that of assessed contributions (dues) from its 193 member nations.