

Evaluating Thailand's Health Condition

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ABSTRACT

This study provides a broad-based view of the health conditions of Thailand at the beginning of the new millennium. It assesses the actual implementation of the Alma-Ata strategy and focuses on four main issues: 1) health status; 2) accessibility of health services; 3) coverage of health and welfare services (including insurance), especially throughout urban and rural areas; and 4) quality of health care services. The study included a literature review, examination and analysis of primary data, interviews with current and past health system personnel and a sample survey of 4,200 households, including 15,900 people. There was also an emphasis on qualitative data, collected in open-ended discussion groups with provincial health care workers and managers in charge of health policy transformation and implementation. In addition, key community leaders' opinions were solicited in order to provide more insight into the performance and the impact of health program on people at the community level.

Thailand's basic health data show considerable progress in health status, health insurance and in the accessibility of health services over the past half century. Overall satisfaction with health services is high in all regions and among groups of the population. These improvements have been experienced by all regions of the country and by all socioeconomic groups. Despite all these improvements, inequalities remain.

INTRODUCTION

Revolutionary Change

A little over a century ago, the clinics and hospitals Thais take for granted today were non-existent. Even the concept of 'medical care' was foreign. When people were sick they might consult a traditional healer. For the most part, however, it was the family and community itself that provided health care for its members.

Aside from the family, there is evidence that religious institutions also played an important role. The local monastery was a place where knowledge about health and cures was stored, disseminated to the population and passed on from generation to generation. The traditional medicine or health care had been transmitted from China and India over a thousand years ago.