

The George Institute and the University of Colombo partner to strengthen health systems in Sri Lanka

Dr Poonam Khetrpal Singh, the Regional Director, World Health Organization South-East Asia Region today inaugurated the Centre for Health Systems Policy and Innovation (CHSPI), an initiative of the World Health Organization with the Asian Development Bank. The Centre is led by the University of Colombo and The George Institute. It aims to support policy and innovations that will strengthen primary health care and health systems in Sri Lanka.

The CHSPI will work towards three objectives- generating evidence that will drive health policy and practice, developing capacities to improve evidence-based policy and decision-making, and creating platforms to increase policy dialogue and build consensus.

Sri Lanka has been globally recognised for operating a highly successful, low-cost healthcare system, providing free health care to all citizens. But in the face of an ageing population and the rising burden of noncommunicable diseases, the Sri Lankan government has been implementing reforms to strengthen primary health care - the backbone of the Sri Lankan system.

Recent events, however, have stalled progress and put additional demands on healthcare services. The COVID-19 pandemic has had significant, long-term impacts on public health, which have been exacerbated by the worst financial crisis the country has faced since it gained independence.

In the context of the country's evolving needs, the CHSPI has been established to identify evidence-based and high impact interventions for health systems strengthening and reform, with a focus on primary health care.

Professor David Peiris, Chief Scientist and Director of the Global Primary Health Care Program at The George Institute, said:

“We're delighted to announce the launch of this partnership with The University of Colombo. The sustained economic downturn has put intense pressure on the Sri Lankan healthcare system, leaving many without essential medicines and services. Through equity-focused research and programming, we aim to support the Sri Lankan government reach the most underserved and help provide affordable and accessible health care for all.”

Professor Vajira Dissanayake, Dean of the Faculty of Medicine at the University of Colombo, said:

“The Centre for Health Systems Policy and Innovation presents an exciting opportunity to provide practical support that will help develop resilient, people-centred health systems. By combining our local expertise with The George Institute's international network of researchers, we aim to drive policy change that sees the Sri Lankan healthcare system bounce back from multiple crises. We look forward to the outputs of this important partnership.”

Dr Alaka Singh, WHO Representative, Sri Lanka said:

“The Centre for Health Systems Policy and Innovation is a very timely initiative for strengthening PHC-orientated health systems going forward in Sri Lanka. It shall create a network of national and international experts and institutions to support the Ministry of Health with multi-disciplinary evidence for decision making and capacity building at all levels as well as create opportunities for experience sharing.”