A key component of URC’s work to improve health systems around the world is a focus on strengthening the health workforce. The pervasive shortage of health workers in rural, remote, and underserved areas exacerbates the health challenges facing already marginalized populations, contributing to preventable disease and death.

Health systems can only function with a trained health workforce. The recruitment, deployment, continuing education, retention, and management of health workers is critical. Health worker performance can be severely constrained by shortages in supplies and equipment, turnover, and lack of support. Growing evidence suggests that the productivity, engagement, and performance of health workers has a direct impact on care outcomes for patients.

ENABLING A HEALTH WORKFORCE

URC’s decades of health workforce development experience have built our reputation as a leader in the field of quality improvement in health. We focus on developing health workforce skills and competencies, continuously improving the quality of care, motivating health workers, and managing their performance.

Together with governments and partners, we build evidence on the effectiveness of and return on investments in human resources through research and implementation practices. URC engages and empowers health workers to identify problems and test their own solutions to ensure sustainability.
To strengthen the health workforce, we use methods including applied research, quality improvement, and digital solutions to:

- Assess and clarify roles, expectations, and tasks within teams;
- Build health worker capacity;
- Develop and test performance incentives and introduce performance measurement;
- Strengthen feedback mechanisms among providers;
- Enhance the work environment and ensure safety of health workers; and
- Engage health workers and managers to identify problems and test solutions.

MENTORSHIP, COACHING, AND PERFORMANCE MANAGEMENT

Through the USAID Applying Science to Strengthen and Improve Systems (ASSIST) Project, URC provided technical assistance to 46 countries to improve the delivery and quality of health care. ASSIST supported health workforce strengthening through interventions including job aids development, promoting task shifting/sharing, strengthening health worker competencies through team-based performance management, coaching, and mentoring, improving the quality and coordination of pre-service training, strengthening the regulatory framework and capacity of professional councils, and extending the reach of community health workers.

TOOLS TO ADDRESS LOCAL GAPS WITH LOCAL SOLUTIONS

Through the USAID Human Resources for Health 2030 (HRH 2030) Project, led by Chemonics, URC supports countries globally to strengthen their health workforce through tailored technical assistance to address human resource and health system gaps. HRH2030 brings a state-of-the-art approach to advance the health workforce agenda – ensuring greater country-level impact. URC developed three Human Resources for Health Optimization Tools (HOT4), Excel-based tool sets that enable facility staff and managers to assess and optimize the human resources needed to reach targeted outcomes.

URC led numerous studies, including a groundbreaking assessment of the social return on investments in Ethiopia's health extension program, lessons learned from the deployment of community-based workers in Kenya and South Africa, and studies of the progress of women in the leadership of Madagascar’s and Senegal’s health and social services sectors.

IMPROVING QUALITY OF CARE THROUGH THE HEALTH WORKFORCE

Many of URC’s projects embed health workforce development into their activities as an essential component of strengthening health systems.

In Uganda, the Regional Health Integration to Enhance Services in Northern Uganda (RHITES-N, Acholi) Activity, USAID’s Regional Health Integration to Enhance Services in East Central Uganda Activity (RHITES-EC), and the Defeat TB Activity all work to improve health outcomes through strengthened service delivery, and ultimately, health workforce strengthening. URC supports Uganda’s district level health system to identify sub-district health workforce gaps and develop plans for improvement using quality improvement approaches.

Under Defeat TB, TB care and treatment is improved through coaching and mentoring of health facility teams to reduce care system bottlenecks to improve TB screening, testing, treatment, and documentation.

In Jordan, URC leads the USAID Health Services Quality Accelerator (HSQA) Activity to accelerate and sustain improvements in reproductive, maternal, newborn, and child health (RMNCH) outcomes through the public and private health sectors. To achieve this goal, URC works closely with the Ministry of Health to improve patient-centered RMNCH core competencies and strengthen the quality of care by health providers.

Quality care can only be delivered if adequate resources are invested in the human resources of the health system. An accessible, well-distributed, supported, and high-performing health workforce is the cornerstone of health service delivery and improved health outcomes.