

Results Profile: Argentina Health Reform



EXPANDING COVERAGE

Argentina Delivers Care to Mothers and Children

Overview

Since 2002, with International Bank for Reconstruction and Development (IBRD) funding and expertise, Argentina has delivered health insurance and secure access to health services to more than one million uninsured pregnant women and children, and has helped drive immunization rates up to 94%.

Full Brief—4 Pages

[Plan Nacer: Health Insurance for the Poor in Argentina](#)—PDF, April 2010

Challenge

Despite a decade of sweeping health care reforms and high per capita health spending, Argentina entered the 21st century with nearly one-third of its population lacking secure access to basic health care. Out-of-pocket spending was high, costing poor families more than 9% of household income on average.

When economic crisis struck in 2001, poverty rates shot up, more than half of low-income households lost their health insurance, and health outcomes deteriorated sharply among the poor. Infant and maternal mortality in particular halted their long decline and began to rise again. Results were worst in the country's poorest provinces.

Approach

The government of Argentina launched Plan Nacer in 2004 as a free, voluntary, public insurance program to cover uninsured mothers during pregnancy and up to 45 days after delivery, as well as children under the age of six. It includes three main features: an explicit menu of benefits; disbursements linked to achieving agreed targets; and independent external audits to verify service delivery and quality.

As part of the Plan Nacer reform effort, the government changed the operating culture of its health system to offer incentives for performance. IBRD assisted with this process by providing analytical support to diagnose the main causes of health system inefficiencies and identify options to better meet the needs of the poor. IBRD approved a [Provincial Maternal Child Health Sector Adjustment Loan](#) to support institutional changes that would form the foundation for planned reforms. Two additional loans supported nationwide roll-out.

More Results 

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million

previously uninsured pregnant women and children who now have health insurance.

MORE INFORMATION

- » [World Bank in Argentina](#)
- » [En Breve: Argentina: Provincial Maternal and Child Health Insurance \(pdf\)](#)
- » [Results-Based Financing Profile: Plan Nacer \(pdf\)](#)
- » [Plan Nacer: An Overview](#)

Argentina's new health system allocates institutional responsibilities as follows:

- The National Ministry of Health: (i) provides funds to the provinces based on attainment of 10 targets, which include both coverage and quality measures; (ii) sets quality standards for service delivery; and (iii) supervises provinces' compliance with standards and accountability.
- The provincial governments: (i) identify the target population; (ii) enroll members into the program; (iii) contract health service providers to deliver the basic package of services; and (iv) establish Provincial Insurance Units.
- Health care providers offer a specified package of cost-effective activities, while increasing quality to attract the beneficiary population. Provincial units reimburse the providers on a fee-for-service basis, which the providers can then invest as they see fit to improve productivity and quality.

Results

Plan Nacer has contributed to the following results:

- More than one million previously uninsured pregnant women and children now have basic health insurance and secure access to services.
- The share of expectant mothers in the poorest northern provinces who receive prenatal consultations by Week 20 has risen to 52 percent from 3 percent.
- National immunization rates have reached 94 percent.
- Infant mortality began to decline again and has fallen 20 percent since 2002 (to 13.3 per 1,000), with the fastest improvement occurring in the poorest provinces.

By moving from a traditional system based on inputs and fixed budgets to one geared around outputs and results, Plan Nacer has given beneficiaries more influence on service providers, enhanced transparency, increased accountability and improved public performance.

Toward the Future

IBRD continues to support Argentina in its efforts to achieve the Millennium Development Goals and its own national health goals. Through 2012, the [Provincial Maternal-Child Health Investment Project](#) will support efforts to update and improve the basic health package and to expand Plan Nacer to cover other population groups and services. The World Bank has also provided technical assistance to enhance the Health Ministry's leadership and management capacity.