CHAPTER 2

**HEALTH**

The Constitution of the Kingdom of Bhutan mandates the state to provide access to free public health services. Since the early years (1960s) of the introduction of modern health care development in Bhutan, the health programme and interventions have focused on the preventive aspects of health care and services. It included the prevention of morbidity, the promotion of positive determinants of health and the control of infectious diseases. These measures were further reinforced after being signatory to the Alma Ata declaration in 1978.

The health program is one of the top priorities of the government. The Ministry of Health in 2019 undertook several reforms and initiatives with the aspiration to ensure universal access to health. There have been continuous efforts and remarkable strides in improving the modern health care systems and services since then. The Ministry of Health has now a widespread network of Health Facilities covering around 95 percent of the total population within three hours walking distance from the health facility. Institutional health facilities were earlier concentrated in the urban centers but today the emphasis has shifted to the rural areas where the majority of the population live.

Health Care is delivered in an integrated three-tiered system with National Referral Hospital at the apex, regional referral hospitals, district hospitals, Primary Health Centers (PHCs) in rural areas and Thromde Health Centers in urban areas at the Community Level. PHCs serve remote populace and are staffed by well-trained health personnel who are equipped to treat minor ailments and advice on preventive measures to avoid the spread of communicable diseases. Extended Health Centers such as Out-reach Clinics (ORCs) and Sub-posts support these PHCs.

There are also a number of special health programs in Bhutan administered by the Ministry of Health. These mainly cover Expanded Program on Immunization (EPI), Reproductive Health (RH), Acute Respiratory Infection (ARI) later upgraded to Integrated Management of Neonatal and Childhood Illness (IMNCI), National HIV/AIDS & STIs Control Program (NACP), National Tuberculosis Control Program (NTCP), National Leprosy Program, Rural Water Supply & Sanitation Program (RWSS), Village Health Workers Program (VHW), Vector Borne Disease Control Program (VDCP) and Mental Health Program among others.

Therefore, in order to provide some account of health sector in Bhutan, this chapter presents statistics covering health infrastructures, health personnel details, top ten morbidity and mortality, outpatient and inpatient cases, immunizations, nutrition, maternal health, child health, family planning, sanitation and information on Traditional Medicine Services.