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WHO and partners continue health sector support

The World Health Organisation (WHO), the European Union (EU) and Luxembourg have expressed their commitment to extend their support to the development of Universal Health Coverage (UHC) in Laos.

The initiative aims to support the policy dialogue on national health policies, strategies and plans, with the overall objective of improving health sector outcomes in the country in the next five years.

The signing ceremony to extend the support took place in Vientiane last week, between WHO representative to Laos, Dr. Juliet Fleischl and Minister of Health, Prof. Dr Eksavang Vongvichit.

The WHO first entered into a collaborative agreement in October 2011 with the EU to support the policy dialogue on national health policies, strategies and plans as well as universal health coverage in fourteen selected countries, officials confirmed.

Dr. Juliet Fleischl said the agreement was further cemented in 2012, when Luxembourg, in line with the internal European harmonisation of health aid, entered into a similar partnership with the WHO.

She said from August 2015, the Lao PDR became another key country to benefit from the partnership supported by Luxembourg. These benefits are expected to continue for the next five years of the partnership towards meeting the overall objective of improving health sector outcomes in the country.

Prof. Dr Eksavang Vongvichit said the health reform strategy has set the Lao PDR to attain Universal Health Coverage by 2025.

He said the UHC is the only tool to ensure all people can access health care services. This will lead to improved health and prevent people from suffering from catastrophic health conditions.

"I am grateful to Luxemburg and the European Union for funding this programme through the WHO and providing valuable support and assistance to the Ministry of Health when it comes to identifying the policy gaps and developing the platforms and mechanism towards universal health coverage," he said.

Prof. Dr Eksavang expressed his gratitude to the WHO in Laos, Luxemburg and the EU, as strong development partners in the health sector in the Lao PDR.

According to the Ministry of Health, the proposed 2016 - 2018 work plan for the UHC Partnership Programme and the identified key strategic areas embraces the UHC. "I want to thank the ministry for supporting the general direction of the work plan and the strategic areas identified," Prof. Dr Eksavang said.

The WHO and the identified departments will then identify the key activities to be undertaken under each of the assigned strategic areas.

From 2016, funds will be disbursed to the ministry through the usual agreed ministry and WHO planning and funding process to support these identified activities.

Through this partnership programme, the WHO looks forward to continuing its support to the MoH towards the achievement of the goals and vision of the Health Sector Reform Plan, which is the Lao PDR's Roadmap towards achievement of Universal Health Coverage by 2025.

By Phetphoxay Sengpaseuth
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