# Zambia Health Shops Program Implementation Strategy

The Zambian government is committed to providing quality health services to all. However, the country continues to experience a high burden of disease, particularly malaria, sexually transmitted diseases, noncommunicable diseases, and high maternal, neonatal, and child morbidity and mortality. To mitigate health sector challenges, the National Health Strategic Plan (2011–2015) is supported by a national drug policy with a mission of ensuring the availability of quality, efficacious, safe and affordable medicines and medical supplies at all level of service delivery.

In 2010, the Ministry of Health (MoH) in collaboration with the World Bank, Crown Agents, Malaria Consortium, Management Sciences for Health, and the Zambia Medicines Regulatory Authority (ZAMRA) (known then as the Pharmaceutical Regulatory Authority) designed and implemented the Zambia Access to ACT Initiative (ZAAI). ZAAI was a pilot project to improve access to artemisinin-based combination therapy (ACT) and rapid diagnostic testing through private sector drug stores. The mid-term review of Zambia’s malaria booster program report had showed that malaria case management was the weakest component of the national malaria control program. Results from the 2008 malaria indicator survey revealed that only 29% of children under the age of five took an antimalarial within 24 hours of onset of symptoms, and only 11% of children living in urban areas and 5%in rural areas took ACT, the first-line treatment, within the recommended time.[[1]](#footnote-1)

Public health centers and hospitals provide free medicines in Zambia; however, the order fill rate of the public sector pharmaceutical supplier, Medical Stores Limited, is 45 to 70%, leaving a gap of 30 to 55% to bridge. Zambia’s urban population, which is only 35% of the country overall, has access to licensed pharmacies. However, because pharmacies only do business in in urban areas, the rural population has no other access to lifesaving medicines when public facilities are out of stock—and rural residents have neither the time nor the resources to travel to cities for health care. As a result, drug stores play an important role in providing access to treatment in areas without pharmacies—which is home to a significant proportion of the population.[[2]](#footnote-2) Drug stores register with the local authorities through trading licenses. They are allowed to dispense over-the-counter drugs, but in reality, they also dispense various prescription drugs.

#### The Health Shop Model

The ZAAI was developed to improve the quality of malaria case management in drug shops through a government accreditation scheme that branded stores participating in the accreditation intervention as “Health Shops,” combined with a subsidy for malaria-related products. Guidelines were developed to govern the operations of the accredited outlets, including standards for premises infrastructure, personnel, records, and products, based Tanzania’s successful accredited drug dispensing outlet model.[[3]](#footnote-3) The training curriculum for Health Shop personnel included dispensing practices, ethics, inventory control, and entrepreneurship. The project also included a community awareness campaign. In 2009, the ZAAI pilot was conducted in four districts (Chama, Chinsali, Kasama, and Lundazi) that had a high prevalence of malaria; 57 drug stores were accredited.

Results of an independent assessment of the pilot showed that in accredited stores, personnel dispensed more ACTs and fewer medicines that were not recommended, including ineffective antimalarials; for example, 82.6% of customers with fever who were exiting accredited stores had bought ACTs versus 17.2% exiting nonaccredited outlets. The use of rapid diagnostic tests increased dramatically, and sellers complied with the results, that is, they dispensed ACTs for a positive test, and they did not dispense an antimalarial for a negative test. Over 80% of customers reporting fever were offered a diagnostic test in accredited store, while none were offered the test in a nonaccredited store. These results mirror those from accredited drug shop programs in Uganda and Tanzania.[[4]](#footnote-4)

#### Regulatory Changes

One of the most striking results of the intervention was its impact on ZAMRA in recognizing the limitations of Pharmaceutical Act (No. 14) of 2004. The Act did not provide for this intervention by allowing drug stores to sell prescription medicines. Based on the pilot results, however, the government recognized the potential of drug stores to play a bigger role in increasing access to medicines, particularly in underserved areas. Therefore, to create regulations that moved drug stores into the formal health sector under ZAMRA oversight, the Pharmacy Act of 2004 needed to be amended. ZAMRA, in collaboration with stakeholders, successfully incorporated the accreditation of drug stores into the new Medicines and Allied Substances Act of 2013. Section 30 (1) of the Act states that “ The Authority may, upon application by a person, issue a Health Shop permit to the person to handle a prescribed list of medicines and allied substances in designated areas under the control and management of such persons as the Authority may authorize.” ZAMRA, working through the ministries of health and justice, awaits the finalization of regulations to implement the Health Shops. Now that the law has been promulgated and the regulations are to be published soon, the government has developed a framework on how to implement the Health Shops initiative in a way that increases access to medicines while protecting the public’s welfare. This legal change will transform the private sector market for medicines in Zambia.

#### The Health Shops Program Goals

The goal of an accreditation scheme based on Medicines and Allied Substance Act and regulations is to improve legal access to a limited list of basic, high-quality prescription and nonprescription essential medicines benefiting priority rural areas. The health shop accreditation initiative aligns with the National Health Strategic Plan, the objective of which is to push toward universal health care. Health Shops would also contribute to achieving the United Nations’ Sustainable Development Goals by helping to ensure equitable and sustainable coverage of quality services to prevent and treat conditions that particularly affect women and children, such as malaria, and family planning.[[5]](#footnote-5)

***Strategy for Implementation***

To achieve this goal, a multifaceted and comprehensive approach is needed. Key strategies in creating the health shops include the following—

* Developing an equitable, affordable, and sustainable accreditation scheme that supports the national public health agenda and complies with the Medicines and Allied Substance Act and regulations
* Strengthening oversight and management of health shops at central, provincial, and district levels to ensure the effective and cost-efficient delivery of quality pharmaceutical services
* Improving access to a limited list of basic, high-quality prescription and non-prescription essential medicines
* Increasing the coverage and quality of services to prevent and treat conditions among citizens, and in particular children and women
* Developing the business capacity of Health Shop owners as entrepreneurs and the capacity of dispensers to better deliver quality services (training, supervision, resource mobilization, entrepreneurship, and networking)
* Strengthening the supply chain for Health Shops
* Developing equitable and sustainable standards of service quality for Health Shops
* Improving customer awareness of product and service quality and the importance of treatment adherence
* Implementing the private sector drug seller accreditation (registration) initiative
* Facilitating evidence-based decision making by coordinating relevant and useful research

#### Health Shops Governance Structure

For the Health Shops initiative to be successful, the MoH will strengthen its stewardship role for health services to ensure transparency, accountability, and efficiency in the implementation. MoH will focus on the following—

* Providing leadership at all levels to formulate policies and translate them into actions geared towards attaining specified goals
* Coordinating both multisectoral and national institutions to ensure effective resource mobilization for health shops programming; implementing an accredited drug seller initiative and bringing it to scale requires committed resources
* Developing appropriate legislation and regulations and ensuring that health shop laws and regulations are available to both the public and private sectors
* Monitoring and evaluating the health shops implementation to ensure the achievement of increasing equitable access to quality pharmaceutical services
* Decentralizing and delegating responsibilities and authority to relevant organizations for strategic planning and budgeting activities as well as training, supervision, and networking among provincial governmental and nongovernmental organizations
* Promoting good corporate governance in the pharmaceutical sector thereby contributing to health systems strengthening and universal health coverage

The MoH in consultation with key stakeholders has identified specific roles and responsibilities to lead this process. As a governance mechanism to ensure better oversight, collaboration, and coordination, a Health Shops National Steering Committee will be established under ZAMRA leadership. Members be drawn from MoH, Ministry of Local Government, Ministry of Commerce and Industry, ZAMRA, Pharmaceutical Society of Zambia, Medical Stores Ltd., World Bank, and UNICEF. The committee will be responsible for carrying out these principles of corporate governance by—

* Defining the coverage of the Health Shops initiative
* Preparing and adopting an Health Shops rollout plan
* Advising and making recommendations to the lead implementing partner
* Regulating and authorizing Health Shops’ medicines and services
* Documenting the implementing process and outcomes

#### Expected Results

The results of implementing a Health Shop program would be a well-regulated retail pharmaceutical sector that provides access to essential medicines—particularly for those who live in underserved rural areas, which is the majority of Zambia’s population. The Health Shops will provide a platform for community-based public health interventions for preventive and curative services could have a tremendous impact on public health concerns such as malaria, tuberculosis, and noncommunicable diseases, thus contributing to the Sustainable Development Goals. The program will also stimulate retail pharmaceutical sector business, thereby increasing revenue for ZAMRA. The success of Health Shops will depend on stable and progressive leadership, governance, human resources, training infrastructure, and most importantly on the availability of sufficient resources to establish and maintain the program.

1. National Malaria Control Centre. 2008 Zambia National Malaria Indicator Survey. Lusaka: MoH. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. World Bank Policy Note: Enhancing Access to Malarial Diagnostics and Treatment through the Private Sector 2012. [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. Rutta E et al. 2015. *JOPPP*. [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. Mbonye AK, et al. 2015. PLoS ONE; Rutta et al. 2011. *Health Research Policy and Systems.* [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
5. UNDP. Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). <http://www.ua.undp.org/content/undp/en/home/mdgoverview/post-2015-development-agenda.html>. Accessed on October 9, 2015. [↑](#footnote-ref-5)