



10
Year
ANNIVERSARY

10 Years of Accompaniment

A Blueprint for Change

#AccompanimentInAction

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Community Health Worker
Supervisor Ramatu Jalloh (right)
visits Fanta (left) at her home.
Photo by Caitlin Kleiboer / PIH

#AccompanimentInAction



"The value of accompaniment to our partners and patients means meeting them where they are in their journey and walking together from start to finish."

- Vicky Reed, executive director of PIH Sierra Leone

01 / Accompaniment at PIH

Partners In Health (PIH) provides a preferential option for the poor in health care by establishing long-term partnerships in settings of poverty. That means that we strive to achieve two overarching goals: to bring the benefits of modern medical science to those most in need of them, and to serve as an antidote to despair.

We strive to create a future in which each and every person's right to quality health care is guaranteed. We accompany our patients, Ministry colleagues, and local and international partners, working with them shoulder to shoulder. We are responsive to the needs of the most vulnerable, appreciating our duty to be flexible and nimble. We recognize that we alone cannot deliver on this cause, and embrace partnerships as the key to furthering our work.



Traditional Birth Attendant Gladys Abu accompanies expectant mother Mary to her appointment at the nearby health facility. Photo by AbuBakarr Sesay / PIH

02 / Our Beginnings



PIH staff carrying medicine, food and other necessities into the red zone at the Maforki Ebola Treatment Unit. Photo by Rebecca Rollins / PIH

At the time that PIH arrived in Sierra Leone the public health situation was dire, and lives were being lost on a daily basis, sadly, many of them healthcare workers. Though PIH's initial idea was to establish an Ebola Treatment Unit (ETU) in rural Kono District, we listened to, and understood the priorities of our government partners and PIH went where the need was greatest. The Ministry of Health (MOH) needed a clinically strong and reliable team to staff and manage the Maforki ETU in Port Loko District. In partnership with the District Health Management Team, PIH began working at the 106-bed ETU, focused on reducing the spread of infection and high mortality rate.

Six months later, PIH's support had reached an additional 15 ETUs across three different districts. PIH trained and deployed expat doctors and nurses, and hired field staff, including Ebola survivors, to support the fight against Ebola.

In October 2014, at the request of the Government of Sierra Leone, PIH arrived in country to support emergency relief efforts in response to the Ebola epidemic. During this time, PIH Sierra Leone (PIH-SL) aimed to address not only the Ebola virus disease, but also the challenges to "staff, stuff, systems, space, and social support" that hampered disease containment efforts—the PIH "5S" approach.

"We felt confident to respond to the Ebola outbreak, not because of our own expertise but because of our local partners."

- Jonathan Lascher, former executive director of PIH Sierra Leone



Patients who survived Ebola tied ribbons around the "Survivors Tree" after being discharged from the Maforki Ebola Treatment Unit. Photo by Rebecca Rollins / PIH

At the height of the emergency response in January 2015, PIH was supporting several facilities—from hospitals and ETUs to small health centers—always in close collaboration with the MOH. Though the Ebola epidemic reached its plateau by the middle of 2015, PIH had witnessed the devastation that the disease had wrecked on communities and the public health system as a whole. We recognized that the work had to continue, and PIH Sierra Leone (PIH-SL) was born.

03 / We are Here to Stay

Prior to the Ebola epidemic, Sierra Leone's decade-long civil war had also taken an immense toll on the country. In Kono District, the epicenter of the war, their only hospital had survived but it was not in a condition to deliver care with the quality that its residents deserved. The country's expansive needs and limited budget meant that Koidu Government Hospital (KGH) struggled to stock pharmacy shelves, provide reliable electricity and maintain essential services. As a result, many families chose not to seek care at KGH, believing that those who entered the hospital would not exit alive.



Kumba Sandy holds her newborn baby after giving birth at Koidu Government Hospital. Photo by Caitlin Kleiboer / PIH

In the aftermath of the Ebola crisis, PIH-SL recognized the great need for continued investments to build a resilient health system. We therefore committed to a long-term health systems strengthening approach to support the MOH and the people of Sierra Leone.



In January 2015, we formalized our partnership with KGH to drastically improve health outcomes, joining forces with MOH, we began strengthening operations and expanded patient-centered services.

Koidu Government Hospital in Kono District from above. Photo by AbuBakarr Tappiah Sesay / PIH

"Whether in terms of breaking the chain of transmission of infectious diseases or strengthening health systems, a strong partnership with the government is indispensable."

- Alusine Mark Dumbuya, director of operations of PIH Sierra Leone



Umu (right), type 1 diabetes patient, with nurse Lilian Phillie checking her glucose levels at the NCD clinic at Koidu Government Hospital. Photo by Michael Duff for PIH.

Now at the 10-year mark, the facility is nationally recognized as a model hospital, drawing patients from across Sierra Leone, and neighboring countries, including Liberia and Guinea. In close collaboration with MOH, we consistently invest across all "5 S's" —staff, stuff, systems, space, and social support. This includes clinical education for MOH and PIH-SL staff, outfitting the facility with the necessary equipment, medications, and commodities, creating new free health care programs like emergency care, mental health care, non-communicable disease treatment, and a Hepatitis B program, improving the physical infrastructure, establishing information management systems, and providing social support to highly vulnerable patients.

04 / Our Journey of Accompaniment

2014

Wellbody Clinic

In 2006, the Wellbody Alliance, a small local NGO in Sierra Leone established a primary health care facility in Kono District. At the heart of this initiative was Dr. Bailor Barrie, co-founder of the Wellbody Alliance and later, executive director of PIH-SL. While Dr. Barrie was establishing Wellbody Clinic, he learned about PIH and reached out to Dr. Paul Farmer for technical guidance. Through the years, Dr. Barrie continued to broaden and deepen his relationship with the inspiring and indefatigable Dr. Farmer, all the while advocating for PIH to expand its work to Sierra Leone. When the Ebola outbreak began, PIH formally partnered with the Wellbody Alliance and now fully operates the Wellbody Clinic.



Today, the Wellbody Clinic serves as a national exemplar of primary health care delivery, training, and innovation. Wellbody is pioneering the use of the Electronic Medical Records (EMR) system, that not only enhances patient management but also ensures continuity of care. The facility is the first in the country that is fully reliant on such an electronic system. Since 2016 only one maternal death has been registered at the clinic, thanks to the ongoing mentorship of maternity staff and the use of maternal waiting homes.



"I had it in the back of my mind that if I was ever able to bring PIH to Sierra Leone, I would be the happiest man. They think about health care differently, and see patients and poor people differently—holistically, and through an eye of social justice."

—Dr. Bailor Barrie, former executive director of PIH-SL

2017

Lakka Government Hospital

Lakka Government Hospital opened the country's first multidrug-resistant tuberculosis (MDR-TB) treatment program. The journey began in 2017, when we partnered with Sierra Leone's National Leprosy and Tuberculosis Control Program (NLTCP), with the mission to enhance MDR-TB care. Our partnership focused on providing technical expertise, supporting the recruitment of staff, facilitating training, procuring medication, and delivering care on-site. Over 880 patients have been supported since 2017 with a treatment success rate standing at 80%. For comparison, the global average for MDR-TB is 59%.



Dr. Girum Tefera checks up on Sorie five days into his course of treatment for MDR-TB at Lakka Government Hospital. Photo by Caitlin Kleiboer / PIH

Today, we continue our work alongside MOH, dedicated to supporting the general operations and maintenance of the hospital. This includes the implementation of the new oral WHO-recommended treatment protocol, known as BPaLM. The treatment regimen, allows patients to take their medication orally rather than through injections, which significantly reduces side effects and improves adherence to treatment. As a result, patients can now be discharged from the hospital 2-3 weeks after starting the medication, cutting the hospitalization time in half and allowing patients to continue their MDR-TB care ambulatorily.

Sierra Leone Psychiatric Teaching Hospital



Juliet with her son Hassan at the Child and Adolescent Mental Health Unit inside the Sierra Leone Psychiatric Teaching Hospital. Photo by Sabrina Charles / PIH

In 2018, alongside MOH, we embarked on a mission to transform the Sierra Leone Psychiatric Teaching Hospital (SLPTH) into a hub for the delivery of excellent mental health care. The facility is the oldest psychiatric hospital in Sub-Saharan Africa and admits some of the country's most vulnerable people who face stigma, abandonment, and extreme poverty from long untreated mental health conditions.

Today, an average of 127 patients are admitted to the hospital each month to receive quality and compassionate care.

With a population of over 8.5 million people and only three active psychiatrists, Sierra Leone faces a high burden of mental health conditions, many of which are rooted in the country's experience with a protracted civil war, epidemics, and natural disasters. In 2022, the hospital received formal accreditation from the West African College of Physicians to host the first psychiatric residency program. Sierra Leone is now able to train its own psychiatrists, for the first time. In addition to the residency program, the strong partnership with MOH led to the creation of the first toll-free, mental health helpline, significantly expanding access to care.

In 2024, Sierra Leone's president declared a national emergency on substance abuse to combat the rising use of drugs. The SLPTH was identified as a referral hospital in Sierra Leone, and opened a new building in June—the Paul Farmer drug treatment and rehabilitation center. The 60-bed facility will provide quality treatment and support to people affected by severe substance abuse.

Maternal Center of Excellence

In 2021, the Maternal Center of Excellence (MCOE) broke ground with the vision of radically reducing maternal, child, and neonatal mortality in Kono District and the country. The MCOE will emerge as a state-of-the-art facility for quality care delivery and a model for training the next generation of health care workers. In partnership with MOH and Build Health International (BHI), who are leading the construction, PIH is working to ensure high-quality maternal and child health care is more accessible and affordable in Sierra Leone.

The MCOE will be a hub of innovation through the development of clinical training, mentorship, and research programs. As an extension of Koidu Government Hospital in Kono District, it will dramatically expand the current 48-bed maternal ward and special care baby unit.



The construction site of the Maternal Center of Excellence next to Koidu Government Hospital. Phot by AbuBakarr Tappiah Sesay / PIH

"It's going to be a space where women are going to feel appreciated and treasured. This is a dream come true."

—Isata Dumbuya, director of reproductive, maternal, neonatal, and child health

Starting in 2022, PIH-SL and MOH began co-implementing the World Bank funded Quality Essential Health Services and Systems Support Project (QEHSSSP) wherein PIH-SL accompanies MOH to improve the quality of essential health services in five districts including, Kailahun, Bonthe, Falaba, Tonkolili, and Western Area Rural. Through this project, the World Bank and the MOH seek to replicate and expand the PIH model from Kono to one-third of the country. Together we are committed to improving and increasing the utilization of maternal and child health care services at community health centers in rural districts so that patients, regardless of where they live or come from, will receive the services they need—and deserve.

In Kailahun District, Jojoima Community Health Center has undergone a remarkable transformation that has significantly improved the provision of health services for the community. We have hired and trained skilled staff, procured essential health commodities such as drugs, medical equipment, laboratory supplies, and ensured that the facility has access to 24-hour electricity as well as running water through the installation of 50,000-liter water tanks.



Miatta (right) with her son after giving birth at Jojoima Community Health Center in Kailahun District. Photo by Caitlin Kleiboer / PIH

Thank you,

to the Government of Sierra Leone for standing in solidarity with PIH-SL; to our supporters and donors for making PIH-SL's vision come to life; to all staff for your dedication and tireless efforts to provide a preferential option for the poor in health care; and to our patients for placing your trust in us.



Partners
In Health

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10 *Year* ANNIVERSARY

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