PUBLIC HEALTH

The governmental policy pursued in the health sector of the Republic of Belarus is aimed at implementing Constitution-guaranteed rights of citizens to health protection, including free treatment in public health institutions and also at providing conditions of free access to the medical service for all citizens.

The President and Government of the Republic of Belarus pay much attention to the sector development. This is evidenced by instructions in the public health sphere in the recent years, adoption of decrees and resolutions aimed at optimizing the system of medical services for the population. In 2005–2006, the rational model of managing health care facilities of the Ministry of Healthcare was approved and intersectoral programs for the five-year period were adopted: the Presidential Program Children of Belarus, State Program of the Rural Area Recovery and Development for 2005–2010, National Program of Demographic Security of the Republic of Belarus, State Program of National Actions to Prevent and Eliminate Drinking and Alcoholism, etc. which deal to a great extent with medical issues.

In fulfillment of instructions of the President of the Republic of Belarus and to efficiently coordinate the activity to attain main objectives of the Public Health Development Concept of the Republic of Belarus for 2003–2007, control purposefulness and efficiency of spending and distributing healthcare resources, the Ministry of Healthcare jointly with the Regional Executive Committees and Minsk Municipal Executive Committee draw up the State Program of Addressing the Main Targets of the Public Health Development Concept in 2006–2007 by optimizing a number of state programs in the healthcare sector. The Sectoral Program of Developing Public Health in the Republic of Belarus for 2006–2010 was drafted.

The main targets of programs in the healthcare sphere are as follows: improving indicators of the population health (reducing general mortality, morbidity, invalidity and level of infant and maternity mortality) and also improving accessibility and quality of medical services.

In addition, more funds were appropriated to improve logistics and equipment of the healthcare facilities. The programs for refurbishing and reequipping surgery blocks and resuscitation departments, developing specialized medical service and recovering the Belarusian rural area allowed for refurbishment and reequipment of healthcare facilities serving the residents of agricultural townships, substantial improvement of the logistics of the rural medical providers and of the republican centers providing high-tech medical aid.

Subject to Decree On Improving Material Incentives of Specific Categories of Physicians of the President of the Republic of Belarus (No. 619 dated 26 December 2005), the salary for highly qualified physicians providing most complex medical interventions was increased.

MAIN PUBLIC HEALTH INDICATORS

In Belarus, according to the Public Health Development Concept, the budget-funded public health system is to be maintained. The population is extensively covered with the hospital medical treatment and is serviced with a sufficient medical personnel. Actions are being taken to provide more economic independence to the health institutions to redistribute funds with account to economic, medical and social efficiency of investments in different spheres, to implement principles of the labor remuneration based on volume, quality and efficiency. The volume of services provided to the population in the governmental health institutions not reduced, but even substantially increased in 1990s.

The Law of the Republic of Belarus On Public Health provides equal opportunities for developing health institutions of different categories of ownership. Over 1,000 licenses have been issued for medical practice to non-governmental health institutions in the republic. In addition, a small volume of paid services is also provided by the governmental health institutions. The state programs in the sphere of health protection are being implemented.

About 5% of the gross domestic product is allocated for the public health care in the Republic of Belarus.
In the recent years, the Republic of Belarus has taken extensive actions to improve the final results of the operation of healthcare institutions, to restructure the sector, save and efficiently use the budget resources. Some positive tendencies of the change in the population health indicators were observed, namely, reduced mortality (including from malignant tumors), primary disability in the able-bodied age; reduced morbidity accompanied by temporary disability, malignant tumors, totally severe intestinal infections, viral hepatitis, syphilis and gonorrhea. The tendency toward reduction in the infectious diseases morbidity, the level of which reduced by 7.8% in 2005 compared to the previous year, prevails. No infectious disease cases with regard to 16 nosologic forms were registered. The children population below 18 years of age in the rural areas is subjected to an extensive prophylactic medical examination.

The shift from planning financial resources for maintaining an extensive network of healthcare facilities to planning of financial resources subject to the standards of the budgetary public health spending in terms of one person was made, with the standards acting as main social standards in the healthcare sphere and serving the basis for developing territorial programs of governmental guarantees for providing free medical service to the Belarusian citizens.

The national health facilities were partially restructured, and the Republican Scientific and Practical Centers were established: Human Radiation Medicine and Ecology Center in Gomel, Mother and Child, Neurology and Neurosurgery Centers. During 2004, 48 health facilities were under construction. Of them, 12 were commissioned, including the hospital with the capacity of 1,207 beds and outpatient hospitals allowing 800 visits a shift. The Children Cardiosurgery Center was opened 1 January 2005 and it was built by the Instruction of the Head of the State. The Center would provide surgery correction of congenital heart diseases in children from 0 to 18 years of age. The planned capacity of the Center is up to 100 open-heart surgery/year.

As of the early of 2005, the medical service for the population was provided in 1,983 outpatient hospitals (being under authority of all sectors), of them in 1,448 outpatient hospitals within the system of the Ministry of Health (MH) of the Republic of Belarus, with 781 being located in the rural area. The Ministry of Health operates 94 dispensaries, 69 stomatological polyclinics, 189 emergency medical service stations and departments, 55 health and 734 feldscher stations, 2,524 feldscher-obstetric stations, and 139 hygiene and epidemiology centers.

The number of visits to physicians (including dentists) per 1 resident in 2005 amounted to 12.5 (2004 — 12.4). The first-aid and emergency service stations serviced 2,953.2 persons in 2005 (319.6 per 1,000 persons). The hospital treatment of the population was provided by 704 health institutions being under the authority of all sectors, including 654 under the authority of the MH, of them, 274 located in the rural area.

In 2005, the number of hospital beds amounted to 105,252 (all sectors being accounted), including 100,539 within the MH system (of them, 7,073 in the rural area). The hospital bed availability amounted to 107.4 per 10 thousand persons, including 103.1 in the MH health institutions.

In 2005, 45.6 thousand physicians of all specialities (all sectors being accounted; 46.8 per 10 thousand persons) and 118.6 thousand specialists of paramedical personnel (121.6 per 10 thousand of population) provided medical services.

Formation of the human health potential depends on multiple factors, namely, lifestyle, genetic predisposition, environmental condition, medical activity of the population, medical service condition and many others.

Over the recent years, demographic processes in Belarus are characterized by the decrease in the reproduction of the population caused by the reduced birth rate and increased death rate should be pointed out.

The decrease in population size also deforms the population structure. The Belarusian population is aging. This problem is most pressing in the rural areas (the population above 60 years of age accounts for 29.1%).
Over the last years, the lowest infant mortality rate has been recorded in Belarus (in 2004—6.4 per 1,000 live births).

Disability. The disabled in Belarus are entitled to the a social assistance from the state. The handicapped rehabilitation system created based on the laws On Social Protection of Invalids in the Republic of Belarus and On Prevention of Disability and Rehabilitation of Disabled sets an objective of implementing stage-wise rehabilitation actions of the medical, medical and professional and professional and social character.

The government and local authorities implement a number of actions of social protection of the disabled by providing them medical service tax and payment benefits, in the sphere of employment, education and professional training.

MEDICAL SERVICE SYSTEM

The governmental medical service system in the Republic of Belarus is structured by the area principle in accordance with the administrative and territorial division.

Rural health institutions provide emergency medical service, first aid and primary feldscher and medical service to the rural population residing in rural and urban-type settlements.

District health institutions provide primary medical service to residents of district centers, as well as sanitary medical and most needed specialized medical service (surgery, otorhinolaryngology, ophthalmology, neurology, endocrinology, psychonuerology, cardiorheumatology) for residents of the entire administrative district.

Municipal health institutions provide the primary medical service, sanitary medical and most needed specialized medical services to urban residents.

Regional and republican health institutions in addition to the mass medical service provide narrow specialized medical service (urology, proctology, etc.).

The Ministry of Health is in charge for managing the health sector through health departments of Regional and Minsk Municipal Executive Committees. Republican health institutions and pharmaceutical enter-prises report directly to the Ministry of Health. In addition to the public providers, private providers employing nearly 6.0% of physicians and paramedical personnel also are available in Belarus.

The sanitary and epidemic protection of the population is ensured by the governmental authorities, all economic entities (irrespective of the subordination and ownership category), officials and citizens and it is aimed at observing sanitary standards, rules and hygienic norms and implementing sanitary hygienic and antiepidemic measures.

The MH authorities and organizations of the sanitary and epidemiological service are in charge of the disease prophylactics by preventing, revealing and suppressing violation of the sanitary and epidemiological legislation.

One of the major spheres of activity of the sanitary and epidemiological service in preventing diseases is promoting the healthy lifestyle. The National Program for Promoting Healthy Lifestyle of the Population of the Republic of Belarus for 2002–2006 is being implemented in the country, with the main target being to provide incentives to the Belarusian citizens for healthy way of life.

The Framework Convention of the World Health Organization to manage tobacco smoking was ratified. Subject to the poll data, the share of the tobacco-smoking population in Belarus reduced by 7.3% (from 41.6% in 2001 to 34.3% in 2005) due to comprehensive actions taken.

To coordinate activities of the state administration bodies and control preventive actions, an Intersectoral Coordination Council charged with protection of the Republic of Belarus from carrying and spreading of the bird flue was established. A Comprehensive Plan of Actions for Bird Flue Prevention in the Republic of Belarus for 2006 was approved. Measures to protect Belarus from import of the bird flue, virus carrying by migrant birds, protect poultry and poultry farms, sanitary/veterinary and sanitary/hygienic measures in selling poultry products, live poultry and measures to protect the population are being taken.
Tendencies in Population Health. Maternity mortality, sexually transmitted diseases prevalence and primary population disability reduced. Lethality of diseases requiring emergency medical aid decreased. The application of novel medical and diagnostic technologies allowed cardiac infarction-related mortality to be reduced. The rehabilitation efficiency of patients who suffered cardiac infarction substantially increased.

PROTECTION OF MATERNITY AND CHILDHOOD

The female population of Belarus accounted for 53.2% of the total population as of early 2005. Women of the fertile age (15–49 years) account for 51.2%, with 78.5% of them residing in the urban area and 21.5% — in rural area.

Nearly 2,700 obstetrician-gynecologists (5.2 per 10 thousand females) provide medical services to women in preventing and treating gynecological diseases, family planning, and meeting women’s medical and sanitary needs related to the reproduction function.

PREPARATION FOR MATERNITY

One of the critical aspects of safe maternity is the earliest visit of a pregnant woman to the obstetrician-gynecologist. To stimulate women to visit the specialists in the early period of pregnancy, an incentive allowance for women visiting the dispensary within the period not exceeding 12 weeks of pregnancy was provided in 1991. As a result, the number of visits to physicians in the early period of pregnancy increased up to 93.5%. Thus, women may be offered an optimal plan of examination during the pregnancy, complications of the fetus condition may be prevented and diagnosed diseases may be timely cured, and the pregnant women may receive a referral for delivery in highly specialized maternity hospitals, if required. In 2004, the National Scientific and Practical Center Mother and Child was established by combining the Research Institute of Congenital and Hereditary Diseases and Research Institute of Maternity and Childhood Protection of the Minsk 7th Municipal Clinical Out-Patient Hospital. The women and spouses encountering infertility and child-bearing problems may receive advice and medical aid in 12 clinics Marriage and Family and 6 medical and genetic clinics.

According to the Belarusian legislation, each woman is entitled to 126-days maternity leave (in case of a difficult labor — 140 days), irrespective of an actual childbirth date, thereby allowing a psychological stress regarding the childbirth date to be relieved. All women who gave birth to a child are entitled to a lump-sum allowance irrespective of the availability and duration of the work record.

HEALTH OF WOMAN AND MATERNITY

The measures taken by the Ministry of Health in the sphere of reproductive health protection and timely aid to newborns and children under 3 years of age allowed infant mortality rate to be stabilized and reduced. Reforms being implemented in the sphere of protection of health of mothers and children are primarily aimed at establishing specialized, furnished with advanced medical equipment prenatal (neonatal) centers based on existing large maternity and children hospitals to admit to such hospitals pregnant women with a high risk for themselves and for their children and severely sick newborns and to provide highly-skilled assistance during delivery and nursing the infants.

Family Planning. One of the most important problems of maintaining a reproductive health is a sexual health and family planning.

A complete set of actions related to prevention of undesirable pregnancy and family planning is implemented by obstetrician-gynecologists and obstetricians. The manuals for pupils, students, and teachers clarifying the issues of a healthy way of life contain sections relating to the sexual education, STI/AIDS prevention and contraception. Measures are taken to enhance the public awareness regarding the use of modern contraceptives. The number of abortions reduced from 144 thousand in 1990 to 41 thousand in 2004.

PROTECTION OF HEALTH OF CHILDREN AND ADOLESCENTS

The important factor affecting health of the children and entire population is immunoprophylaxis. The coverage of children with preventive vaccinations against all infections included into the immunization program amounted to nearly 98%. As a result, measles
prevalence reduced 45 times, epidemic parotiditis — 21 times, diphtheria — 2.3 times and rubella — 1.8 times compared to 2001. In 2002, Belarus was certified as the poliomyelitis-free territory.

The sanitary and spa treatment is provided to the Belarusian population by MH sanatoriums, sanatorium associations and sanatoriums and preventoria of the ministries and departments. Since 1997, the national system of sanatorium and spa treatment exists. The National Center for Rehabilitation and Sanatorium and Spa Treatment of the Population has been established. 50 sanatoriums and boarding guest houses offering treatment, 27 children sanatoriums and boarding guest houses, 75 sanatoriums and preventoria, 4 rest houses and holiday hotels, 150 recreation and other rest facilities (of all departments) operate in Belarus as of early 2005. 13 sanatorium departments of medical rehabilitation also operated in 2004.

State Research and Technical Programs and Prospects of Medical Science Development. 5 Research Institutions, 8 National Scientific and Practical Centers, 4 institutions of higher education and Belarusian Medical Academy of Post-Graduate Education function within the MH system. They employ 3.5 thousand researchers, of them, 350 Doctors and 1,266 Candidates of Medical, Biological, Chemical, etc. Sciences. Currently, a number of state Scientific and Technical Programs are being implemented in the priority spheres of the medical science. Researches being conducted within the framework of the social order are aimed at addressing priority targets of practical health care.

MEDICAL EDUCATION

Currently, 4 Medical Universities train professionals with a higher medical education. Physicians in the Belarusian State Medical University are trained at 6 Departments: Preventive Therapy, Pediatric, Stomatological, Military Medical, Medical Preventive and Medical (for foreign students).

The Grodno State Medical University trains students at the Therapeutic, Pediatric, Medicopsychological Departments and at the Department for Foreign Students and at the Division of Nurses with higher education.

The Gomel State Medical University trains physicians at the Preventive Therapy Department and Therapeutic and Diagnostic Division.

The Vitebsk State Medical University trains physicians at the Preventive Therapy Department, at the Department for Foreign Students, and also trains Pharmacists at the Pharmaceutical Department.

Physicians upgrade their skills in 74 medical specialities in the Belarusian Medical Academy of Post-Graduate Education. The follow-up training for pharmacists is arranged at the Vitebsk State Medical University.

The paramedical personnel is trained in 4 Belarusian State Medical Colleges and 13 medical schools in the following specialities: nurse, feldsher, obstetrician, dentist, dental technician, laboratory assistant, etc.

The procedure of targeted training of medical and pharmaceutical specialists is governed by the Regulation On Targeted Training of Qualified Workers (Employees) and Specialists approved by Resolution No. 429 of 30 March 2006 of the Council of Ministers of the Republic of Belarus. Entrants wishing to get targeted training in institutions of higher medical education are enrolled from among school leavers of the secondary general, secondary specialized and vocational schools, residing in the Chernobyl nuclear disaster-affected settlements or rural settlements, with the needs of medical providers in specialists of the respective medical and pharmaceutical background being accounted. An entrant should leave the institution of education in one of the above mentioned Belarusian settlements, where he/she received training and resided not less than two years, have a certificate of education specifying disciplines of entrance examinations with marks not less than six.

The targeted training of specialists with higher and secondary medical and pharmaceutical education is effected annually within the range of 10 percent of targets of
enrollment to the respective Departments in institutions of higher and secondary medical education. 

The paramedical personnel upgrades its skills in the National Educational Center for Training, Retraining and Qualification Upgrading of the Medical Personnel. 

LOGISTICS IN THE HEALTH SECTOR 
DRUG SUPPLY SYSTEM IN THE HEALTH SECTOR 

Currently, a stable pharmaceutical market is available in the Republic of Belarus. 7 state-owned unitary enterprises Pharmacea (1 republican and 6 regional enterprises) having a chain of more than 841 drug stores, 311 pharmaceutical stations, 466 pharmaceutical stalls of the 1st category and 2,981 pharmaceutical stalls of the 2nd category are supplying drugs to the population and state-owned medical facilities. One of the functions of the state-owned drug stores is to provide drugs to specific categories of citizens free or at reduced prices. The governmental agencies determine the list of diseases and groups of population which receive drugs at reduced price or free. The cost of drugs provided by pharmacies at reduced-price or free prescriptions is covered from the budget. 

In addition, 290 legal entities of the non-governmental category of ownership and individual businessmen provide drugs to the population. They have a retail network comprising 337 drug stores, 438 pharmaceutical stations and 5 pharmaceutical stalls of the 1st category. Totally, they employ 10 thousand pharmaceutical specialists. 

GOVERNMENTAL CONTROL OVER CIRCULATION OF DRUGS AND TURNOVER OF NARCOTICS, PSYCHOTROPIC SUBSTANCES AND THEIR PRECURSORS 

Within the framework of pursuing the governmental policy in the sphere of drugs supply to provide the population with accessible highly effective and safe medicinal aid, the Ministry of Health exercises the governmental control over the activity of legal entities of all categories of ownership and individual businessmen. 

Since the drugs form a specific category of products which may damage human health if the rules of developing, testing, manufacturing, storing, selling and administering are violated, the control has to be exercised at all stages of the drug promotion: 
• state registration of drugs by application of a drug manufacturer; 
• licensing medical and pharmaceutical activity and also activity related to the turnover of narcotics, psychotropic substances and their precursors; 
• exercising control over the drugs quality in the process of their manufacture and import to the Republic of Belarus. The Belarusian control and analytical service comprises 8 laboratories which passed accreditation for competence and independence in the system of laboratory accreditation of the RB State Standard Committee; 
• exercising control over observance of licensing requirements and conditions by legal entities of all categories of ownership and individual businessmen in effecting medical and pharmaceutical activity and also activity related to the turnover of narcotics, psychotropic substances and their precursors based on licenses of the Ministry of Health; certification of drugs manufacturers for their compliance with requirements of the OMP; 
• collecting and assessing the data on revealed side responses to the drugs and making the necessary recommendations for restraining their use or withdrawal from sale; 
• exercising control over drugs advertising; 
• developing regulatory and legal acts of the Republic of Belarus governing the drugs circulation. 

Pharmaceutical Industry. The main drug manufacturers in the Republic of Belarus comprise 10 state-owned enterprises incorporated in the Belbiofarm Concern and 2 private enterprises. Currently, the Ministry of Health of the Republic of Belarus registered over 800 descriptions of domestically manufactured drugs. The domestic pharmaceutical industry meets the total requirements of the state-owned drug store network at a level of 26.1% as of 1.1.2006.
To more fully provide the population with efficient safe and high-quality local drugs, the Belarusian government adopted the State Program of Pharmaceutical Industry Development for 2005–2010 providing for dynamic development of the domestic pharmaceutical industry which is to be state-regulated for efficient operation of the sector’s enterprises.

**HEALTH SECTOR LOGISTICS**

The Republican Specialized Production and Commercial Enterprise Belmedtekhnika pursues the governmental policy in the sphere of health sector logistics and is in charge of the following:

- determining the needs of the MH institutions and other medical providers in medical equipment, spares and consumables based on modern information technologies;
- supplying the above products to health institutions and selling them through wholesale and retail subsidiaries, including through leasing and consignment;
- exporting locally manufactured medical equipment and medical products;
- installing, maintaining and repairing medical equipment including the warranty repair;
- providing technical assistance to health care institutions in mastering and using medical equipment, as well as exerting control over its operation.

**INTERNATIONAL COOPERATION IN HEALTH SECTOR**

The activity of the Ministry of Health of Belarus in the sphere of foreign relations is aimed at improving the population health and medical services quality by implementing the best international experience into the Belarusian healthcare practice, attracting foreign resources to implement medical projects in coordination with the Ministry of Foreign Affairs.


The healthcare problems the CIS countries face are efficiently address-ed by the CIS Healthcare Cooperation Council.

Great attention is paid to cooperation with authoritative international organizations such as the UN and specialized agencies in its structure.

The major emphasis is placed on cooperation with the World Health Organization (WHO). Two-year cooperation plans with the WHO European Bureau serve the basis for specific activities. Joint projects in the sphere of reforming the healthcare system (primary health care, financing), environment and health and TB management are being actively and efficiently implemented. The cooperation plan with the WHO European Bureau for 2006–2007 comprises the following priorities: improving the primary healthcare; reproductive health; improving drugs policy; noninfectious diseases prevention and management; improving the system of safety of blood and blood products; improving the system of managing diseases prevented by immunization.

The project on Promoting Access of Adolescents to Reproductive Health Services and Information is being successfully implemented jointly with UNFPA. Youth Health Centers are available in Mogilev and Soligorsk and are to be opened in Grodno, Gomel and Vitebsk.

The project of Developing the Quality Assurance System (Quality Control) for X-Ray Computer Tomographs in the Republic of Belarus is being implemented within the framework of the Technical Cooperation Program of the IAEA for 2005-2006.

The project of Developing and Building up Services and Organizations Involved in AIDS Prevention and Drug Addiction Treatment Among Drug Users in Belarus, Moldova, Russia and Ukraine is being implemented jointly with the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime. The Global Fund to Fight HIV/AIDS, Tubeculoses and Malaria provided the grant to implement the project HIV/AIDS Prevention and Treatment in the Republic of Belarus.
The UNICEF Country Program was developed for Belarus for 2006–2010. This Program serves as a basis to draw up the Plan of Actions Within the Framework of the Country Program Between the Government of the Republic of Belarus and United Nations Children’s Fund (UNICEF) for 2006–2010.

The Belarusian-American project aimed at studying thyroid cancer and other diseases in the Belarusian population affected by the Chernobyl nuclear disaster is being implemented subject to the implementation program.

Additional information:

- Ministry of Health of the Republic of Belarus
  http://minzdrav.by
- National Institution Sanitary and Spa Center Tsentrkurort of the Administration of Affairs of the President of the Republic of Belarus
  http://otpusk.by