

**BUILDING NETWORKS OF
PRIMARY CARE PROVIDERS
IN CHINA**

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Executive summary

1. A well developed network of primary care providers can improve accessibility of health care. With the referral system, primary care providers can function as the “gatekeeper” of hospital resources and reduce health expenditure. Primary care providers, with better knowledge of patients’ health condition, may also advise patients on their selection of better quality hospital care.
2. Two most serious problems with the Chinese health system are the rapidly increasing health expenditure and inaccessibility of health facilities to patients, attributable to the underdevelopment of primary care providers.
3. Since the 1980’s, primary care providers in China in both rural and urban areas have been marginalized due to the underdeveloped referral system between primary care providers and hospitals, the poor marketization of health service provision and the withdrawal of governmental support.
4. Since the 2000’s, the Chinese government has offered favorable policies to encourage enrollees of the new rural and urban social health insurance plans to visit primary care providers. Substantial investments in primary care providers, especially for infrastructure building, have also been made. The reimbursement method for primary care providers is likely to be reformed in the near future.
5. Improving the referral system and enhancing the role of private providers in the primary care sector have been included in the reform agenda. Pilot reforms in both rural and urban areas are being conducted. Among these reforms, one important trend is to integrate hospitals and primary care clinics in a hierarchical manner.

6. Some issues however remain to be addressed. First, payment methods for primary care providers need to be carefully designed. Second, regulation of primary care providers has yet to be developed. Third, the effectiveness of recent pilot reforms on the hierarchical governance of health service providers remains questionable.