

Publication

A health systems resilience research agenda: moving from concept to practice

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Health system resilience, known as the ability for health systems to absorb, adapt or transform to maintain essential functions when stressed or shocked, has quickly gained popularity following shocks like COVID-19. The concept is relatively new in health policy and systems research and the existing research remains mostly theoretical. Research to date has viewed resilience as an outcome that can be measured through performance outcomes, as an ability of complex adaptive systems that is derived from dynamic behaviour and interactions, or as both. However, there is little congruence on the theory and the existing frameworks have not been widely used, which has diluted the research applications for health system resilience. A global group of health system researchers were convened in March 2021 to discuss and identify priorities for health system resilience research and implementation based on lessons from COVID-19 and other health emergencies. Five research priority areas were identified: (1) measuring and managing systems dynamic performance, (2) the linkages between societal resilience and health system resilience, (3) the effect of governance on the capacity for resilience, (4) creating legitimacy and (5) the influence of the private sector on health system resilience. A key to filling these research gaps will be longitudinal and comparative case studies that use cocreation and coproduction approaches that go beyond researchers to include policy-makers, practitioners and the public.

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