NEW RESEARCH FROM THE COALITION:
Stock-outs of essential medicines among CHWs are rampant and getting worse

Community Health Workers (CHWs)—people trained to provide basic health services to their neighbors—have long served as a trusted source of primary healthcare in communities around the world. The World Health Organization suggests strategies for ensuring adequate availability of commodities and consumable supplies to CHWs. Yet these strategies are not widely adopted, resulting in rampant stock-outs at the community level that threaten lives and livelihoods.

New research from the Community Health Impact Coalition in collaboration with UNICEF examines for the first time ever how often CHWs are out of stock. The systematic review included twenty-eight articles, published between 2006 and 2021, involving 62,372 CHWs and 2,383 health centers, that described community level stock-outs of essential medicines.

![Chart showing stock-out prevalence]

CHWs are out of stock nearly \( \frac{1}{3} \) of the time, and the problem is getting worse

A comparison of the period 2006–2015 and 2016–2021 showed that CHW stock-out levels increased from 26.36% [95% CI 26.22–26.50] to 48.65% [95% CI 48.02–49.28] while that of health centers increased from 7.79% [95% CI 7.16–8.42] to 14.28% [95% CI 11.22–17.34].

The research concluded that stock-outs are getting worse, and that there are particular barriers at the last mile. This may be explained by the fact that CHWs are often not included in health worker registries used for supply forecasting or are last in line to receive essential supplies in the event of unforeseen shortages.

Community-level stock-out of essential medicines constitutes a serious threat to achieving universal health coverage. There is an urgent need to address the health and non-health system constraints that prevent the essential medicines procured for LMICs by international and national stakeholders from reaching the people who need them the most.

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Community Health Impact Coalition