

## RAND RESEARCH AREAS

CHILDREN AND FAMILIES  
EDUCATION AND THE ARTS  
ENERGY AND ENVIRONMENT  
HEALTH AND HEALTH CARE  
INFRASTRUCTURE AND TRANSPORTATION  
INTERNATIONAL AFFAIRS  
LAW AND BUSINESS  
NATIONAL SECURITY  
POPULATION AND AGING  
PUBLIC SAFETY  
SCIENCE AND TECHNOLOGY  
TERRORISM AND HOMELAND SECURITY

This fact sheet is part of the RAND Corporation research brief series. RAND fact sheets summarize published, peer-reviewed documents.

Headquarters Campus  
1776 Main Street  
P.O. Box 2138  
Santa Monica, California  
90407-2138  
TEL 310.393.0411  
FAX 310.393.4818

© RAND 2010

## Private Sector Participation and Health System Performance in Sub-Saharan Africa

There is little consensus about the appropriate role of the private health sector in developing countries, particularly as it affects access and equity. Critics of increased private sector participation argue that high fees are likely to exclude the poor, while proponents argue that relieving severe health care resource constraints may increase access and allow governments to focus more attention on the poor.

To address this knowledge gap, RAND and University of Southern California researchers analyzed nationally representative data on child and maternal health care use from 34 sub-Saharan African countries to examine the association between the degree of private sector participation in the health care system and outcomes related to access and equity. The analysis focused on births/deliveries and treatment of acute respiratory illness for children under three years of age. The analysts used statistical techniques to control for potentially confounding factors that might influence the results.

Key findings from the analysis include the following:

- Increased private sector participation is strongly associated with increased access to health care facilities. For example, estimates suggest that a 10-percentage-point increase in the number of children treated for acute respiratory illness in a private health care facility is associated with an 11-percentage-point increase in the number of children treated for acute respiratory illness in any health care facility. Access to health care facilities for childbirth is also significantly higher when private sector participation is higher.
- Increased private sector participation is associated with reduced disparities in care, as measured, for example, by the relative likelihood that women from rich households give birth in a health care facility compared with that for women from poor households or the likelihood that rich children receive treatment for respiratory illness in a facility compared with the likelihood for poor children. Analyses identified similar reductions in urban-rural access disparities.

Overall, the study points to the potential importance of private sector health care in sub-Saharan Africa. However, the authors note that the appropriate role for the private health sector may be country-specific and depends on the health care financing system, the organization of the public health sector, and the ability of governments to provide effective oversight.

Office of Congressional Relations | 703-413-1100 x5320 | [ocr@rand.org](mailto:ocr@rand.org) | [www.rand.org/congress](http://www.rand.org/congress)

---

This fact sheet was written by Mary E. Vaiana. The RAND Corporation is a nonprofit institution that helps improve policy and decisionmaking through research and analysis. RAND's publications do not necessarily reflect the opinions of its research clients and sponsors. RAND® is a registered trademark.

**RAND Offices**

Santa Monica, CA • Washington, DC • Pittsburgh, PA • New Orleans, LA/Jackson, MS • Boston, MA • Doha, QA • Cambridge, UK • Brussels, BE



# HEALTH

CHILDREN AND FAMILIES  
EDUCATION AND THE ARTS  
ENERGY AND ENVIRONMENT  
HEALTH AND HEALTH CARE  
INFRASTRUCTURE AND  
TRANSPORTATION  
INTERNATIONAL AFFAIRS  
LAW AND BUSINESS  
NATIONAL SECURITY  
POPULATION AND AGING  
PUBLIC SAFETY  
SCIENCE AND TECHNOLOGY  
TERRORISM AND  
HOMELAND SECURITY

The RAND Corporation is a nonprofit institution that helps improve policy and decisionmaking through research and analysis.

This electronic document was made available from [www.rand.org](http://www.rand.org) as a public service of the RAND Corporation.

This product is part of the RAND Corporation research brief series. RAND research briefs present policy-oriented summaries of individual published, peer-reviewed documents or of a body of published work.

## Support RAND

[Browse Reports & Bookstore](#)

[Make a charitable contribution](#)

## For More Information

Visit RAND at [www.rand.org](http://www.rand.org)

Explore [RAND Health](#)

View [document details](#)

## Limited Electronic Distribution Rights

This document and trademark(s) contained herein are protected by law as indicated in a notice appearing later in this work. This electronic representation of RAND intellectual property is provided for non-commercial use only. Unauthorized posting of RAND electronic documents to a non-RAND Web site is prohibited. RAND electronic documents are protected under copyright law. Permission is required from RAND to reproduce, or reuse in another form, any of our research documents for commercial use. For information on reprint and linking permissions, please see [RAND Permissions](#).