

# Healthcare Challenges and Business Sustainability in Pakistan

Pakistan is said to be continuously progressing towards Sustainable Development Goal 3 – Good Health and Well-being, and SDG 2 – Zero Hunger. This was reported in the Economic Survey of Pakistan in the 2024-25 edition. However, business sustainability challenges for healthcare continue to rise due to the declining quality of infrastructure and lack of resources. Although progress has been made, the far-flung interior and rural regions of Pakistan still find healthcare to be an unreachable luxury. Business sustainability for this sector, therefore, remains vulnerable.

## Key Challenges Facing Pakistan's Healthcare Sector

Pakistan's healthcare industry is among the most underappreciated sectors. Insufficient government funding, a rising population, and weak infrastructure are some of the major indicators. Let's briefly look at the current challenges:

- 1) **Insufficient Funding** - In 2024, only 0.9% of the total Gross Domestic Product (GDP) was allocated to the healthcare sector. This is much lower than the World Health Organization (WHO) recommended 5%. It is one of the weakest in the South Asian region.

The inadequate financial resources result in a lack of hospital facilities, outdated equipment, and scarce medical supplies. This shortage causes a huge gap in the demand and supply of medical assistance for the public. In addition, public healthcare centers lack basic amenities such as diagnostic tools, testing equipment, and even life-saving drugs.

- 2) **Scarcity of Qualified Healthcare Professionals** - The ratio of medical personnel (doctors, nurses, paramedics) to patients is drastically low in Pakistan. The doctor-to-patient ratio is reported to be 1:1,300 and the nurse-to-patient ratio is 1:50. These figures are far below WHO recommendations of 1:1,000 and 1:10, respectively.

Such an unreasonable divide compromises the quality of healthcare services and staff performance. The workforce is likely to be exhausted due to long hours and may face burnout. This eventually leads to incompetence, diagnostic errors, inadequate medical treatment, poor patient care, and employee turnover. As a result, people start losing trust and confidence in healthcare professionals and the system. The shortage of medical staff also results in increased waiting times, compromised quality, and sometimes insufficient attention.

- 3) **Barriers to Medical Education and Training** - Unfortunately, the current capacity of medical practitioners is insufficient and not in line with the country's population growth. Several factors contribute to this, such as a lack of medical schools and instability in regulatory bodies. Moreover, medical students are not provided with enough practical experience in the latest equipment and treatment techniques. The workforce that enters the mainstream remains unequipped, untrained, and unprepared to cope with present-day problems. The burden then falls on the

existing workforce, further decreasing their productivity, work output, and motivation—directly impacting patient experience.

- 4) **Disparity of Access in Rural Communities** -

Medical assistance is readily available to people in major metropolitan cities such as Karachi, Lahore, and Islamabad.

However, patients from rural areas such as interior Sindh or Punjab, or remote villages of Balochistan, Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, and Gilgit- Baltistan continue to suffer due to a lack of proper transportation and the unavailability of local healthcare centers.

Women, children, marginalized communities, and minorities in particular face disparity and bias. Their situation is far more stringent due to cultural customs, remoteness, and financial constraints. Timely access to healthcare and medical assistance almost feels like a burden.

Business sustainability in the healthcare industry can only be achieved if these challenges are strategically addressed. People must never be deprived of a basic right such as healthcare.

The accountability and responsibility to establish accessible healthcare for all remain with the state. Factors such as geographical or financial situations of patients should never become a hindrance when it comes to their health and well-being.

- 5) **Energy Crisis** - The energy crisis is at the center of the economic downfall happening in Pakistan. Achieving and maintaining business sustainability in the presence of an energy shortfall is nothing but a far-fetched daydream. In the midst of it, the healthcare sector also takes the plunge. Frequent load-shedding and increasing electricity costs prevent hospitals from operating at full potential.

For hospitals to smoothly carry out their services, continuous electricity supply is imperative. Unexpected power outages can result in irreversible damages such as operation theatre fatalities and life-threatening conditions. Hospitals switch to alternate energy sources such as generators to manage the power crisis. Although it provides a plausible solution, it comes with a cost—the burden of which must be borne by patients as an additional service fee.



**Faraz Ahmad Memon, FCMA**  
Director, Risk Management & Costing, Patel Hospital, Karachi

- 6) Long Distance and Poor Transport** - Access to healthcare in remote and rural areas remains a significant challenge. People end up in worse conditions or even face death due to the long distance to even the nearest facility. The underdeveloped roads in these regions add to their misery, making it almost impossible to receive assistance during emergencies.

More often than not, there are not enough healthcare centers in remote areas, and people must travel from one location to another. Additionally, these facilities are likely to have limited resources such as medicines, blood sampling, or scanning equipment. This not only leads to delayed care but also causes patients to suffer.

### Impact of Healthcare Deficiencies on Business Sustainability

Poor healthcare infrastructure substantially undermines business sustainability due to workforce incompetence, rising operational expenditure, and impeded overall economic prosperity.

- 1) Shortage of Educated Paramedics** - Nurses and paramedical staff are the support pillars of a country's healthcare system. WHO published a health workforce profile of Pakistan in 2020, which reported an alarming critical shortage of nurses. It further stated that only 5% of nursing staff are university graduates, holding a Bachelor of Science (BSc) degree or higher. This is a shocking statistic considering the ever-growing need for nursing and paramedical personnel. The shortage of staff is primarily caused by a lack of attractive incentives for healthcare professionals, leading to absenteeism and brain drain.
- 2) Increased Cost** - Poor medical infrastructure adds to rising healthcare costs. Often, public healthcare centers are either overcrowded, understaffed, or lack basic equipment, which forces patients to opt for expensive private clinics. Remote and rural regions are particularly affected. Inadequate facilities mean traveling to nearby villages or cities for basic medical needs, bearing additional transport and lodging expenses. The system is further hampered by the deficiency of preventive care and a well-organized record-keeping mechanism.
- 3) Deters Foreign Investment** - Pakistan, unfortunately, has a healthcare system that is not at par with international standards. As a result, there is a lack of foreign investment in this sector. Investors view the availability of quality healthcare as a key indicator when assessing potential markets. International investors, therefore, lack confidence in sending their workforce or initiating business relationships in countries with unreliable healthcare systems.  
Healthcare businesses are further stalled due to a lack of public-private partnerships and shaky investor confidence. The result is stagnant economic growth, no innovation, and an uncertain future.
- 4) Hindrance in Talent Attraction and Retention** - Skilled professionals are reluctant to take up roles in areas with minimal or no healthcare services. Access to quality medical facilities is a defining factor for top talent when deciding whether to accept a job offer. Businesses in those regions face high employee turnover rates and increased hiring costs. Maintaining business continuity

and productivity then becomes a struggle for organizations. Strategic investment, technological innovation, and infrastructure development are therefore inevitable in the healthcare industry.

- 5) Risk of Disease Outbreak** - The fragile healthcare infrastructure puts Pakistan at risk of disease and virus outbreaks. It poses a great threat not only to people's lives but also to economic growth. With limited diagnostic facilities, poor sanitation, and overcrowded hospitals, the spread of infectious diseases becomes highly probable. To achieve business sustainability, Pakistan must take radical measures to strengthen its healthcare systems. A vigorous and dynamic healthcare infrastructure is essential for economic stability and long-term business resilience.
- 6) Reduced Competitiveness** - The existing condition of Pakistan's healthcare infrastructure hinders the country's position in the national and international landscape. Employees who are unable to access basic healthcare weaken the overall workforce's well-being, productivity, and motivation. A robust healthcare system not only fosters employee well-being but also lays the foundation for a high-performing and competitive ecosystem.

### Final Thoughts

Pakistan's healthcare infrastructure remains a significant concern in the pursuit of business sustainability. Factors such as limited government expenditure and funding, inadequate medical education and training, scarcity of medical and paramedical staff, the national energy crisis, and disparities among rural communities all contribute to the ongoing challenges.

The inadequacy of the healthcare system deters foreign investment, hinders talent attraction and retention, increases operational costs and the risk of disease outbreaks, and undermines the growth potential and competitiveness of the industry. It is high time for governing bodies and medical boards to sincerely contribute to the prosperity of this sector. Preventive strategies must be developed, competitive goals set, and improvement plans implemented to attract investors and top talent. Embracing the latest medical technologies is also essential to maintaining a competitive edge in the region.

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**About the Author:** The writer is a Fellow Member of ICMA currently serves as Director Risk Management & Costing at Patel Hospital, Karachi. He is also serving as Member of EC-Finance Committee at Patel Hospital. He possesses over 24 years of experience across diverse industries like hospital and healthcare, food and retail, and the garment sector. His areas of expertise include business transformation and automation, risk management, internal controls, performance analysis, financial management, management accounting, budgeting and costing, etc. He is pursuing an MBA (Healthcare) from the Institute of Business & Health at the Dow University of Health Sciences.