



## The Strategic Role of 1166 Health Helpline in Public Health Emergencies & Programs in Pakistan

The journey of becoming a one-stop health resolution platform through provision of services & solutions accessible to the vulnerable population of all ages.

Amidst the hustle and bustle of the bustling 1166 Sehat Tahaffuz Call Center, a phone rang continually, breaking the monotony of the busy day. In a small cubicle tucked away in a corner, the operator warmly greeted the caller saying, "hello, how may i assist you today?" A distraught mother on the other end of the line "my child is having fever and chills after vaccination," the mother confided, her concern palpable. The tremble in the mother's voice spoke volumes of her worry and fear. The operator, with a calming tone and her voice filled with empathy, listened intently. It was a call that the operator had become accustomed to, an all-too-common occurrence in her line of work. The operator nodded sympathetically, understanding the anxieties that often-followed vaccinations. She had encountered similar calls before, and her experience had taught her the value of sympathy and comfort. The operator responded, "i understand your concern ma'am, rest assured; we are here to help you. Let me connect you with a doctor who can assist you further." The mother's tension seemed to ease slightly, comforted by the operator's words. The mother's voice was filled with gratitude as she thanked the operator before the transfer in that brief moment. The operator knew she had made a difference, providing support and guidance to a worried parent.

As the helpline operators comforts one concerned parent, another call comes in, this time, an enraged grandfather's voice boomed through the receiver, vehemently refusing entry to the vaccination team. "I absolutely will not permit your team to set foot in my house for vaccination. Do not dare send them again!" he exclaimed, frustration dripping from his words. Undeterred by the resistance, the operator recognized the urgency of the situation and took it upon herself to counsel the resistant family. With an understanding tone, she patiently engaged in a conversation, as he vented his frustrations, allowing him to release his built-up tension. She acknowledged the grandfather's authority over his household and emphasized that his decision would be respected however, understanding the importance of building trust, the operator shared relevant information about the benefits of vaccination, emphasizing its role in safeguarding the health and well-being of his children. She provided accurate and reliable information to alleviate any misconceptions. By the end of the conversation, the operator hoped to have planted a seed of understanding and openness within the resistant family. Moments later, another caller reached out as a worried parent spoke in a hushed voice, "Salam, my child's EPI vaccination card got misplaced." his voice echoing with urgency. Sensing the frustration and anxiety in the caller's voice, the operator empathetically responded, "Don't worry. We'll help you retrieve the necessary information."



Such interactions occur every day at the 1166-health helpline, where empathy and understanding are paramount. Voices like these and many more filled the call center every day, from early morning hours until midnight, 7 days a week, 365 days a year. The dedicated team of operators work tirelessly, their compassion and expertise providing a lifeline to those in need.

The ringing phone persisted, the stories pouring in like waves crashing against the shore. Each caller sought solace and guidance for their unique troubles. "Ring Ring," the next call began, the voice on the other end trembling with anxiety. "I am going through acute stress. I am afraid that I may unintentionally harm someone". The operator's heart ached at the caller's anguish. Alarmed yet composed, the operator grasped the gravity of the situation. "I'm here for you. You're not alone in this"; offering comfort and instantly connecting them with the help they desperately needed "Sir, I am connecting your call with a psychotherapist right away! The cycle continued, call after call, each bearing its own set of worries and concerns. "AoA, the vaccine was not available when I visited the hospital. Please assist as I have to travel," someone pleaded anxiously. With a deep breath, the operator reassured the caller, "I understand your urgency. Let me find a solution for you." As the operator dealt with each call, their dedication unwavering, the next plea for assistance echoed through the

phone, another call from someone whose house had been overlooked during a vaccination campaign. Their plea was simple: "The team skipped my house during the campaign. Please send the team again as my child missed the dose; the father requested. "Undeterred, the operator patiently listened and made a note of their address, promising to rectify the oversight. But the demands of the day were far from over. Another voice crackled through the line, "Hello, I am unable to process my payment for the vaccination E-certificate." The operator's fingers danced across the keyboard, determined to resolve the technical glitch hindering the caller's progress. They offered words of encouragement, "I'm here to help you navigate this issue. Together, we'll make it work." From the moment the operators picked up the phone until the end of each call, their mission was clear; to be the compassionate voice on the other end of the line, tirelessly working to alleviate the worries and fears of those who reached out. They listened, counseled, and reported, ensuring that every concern was addressed and no cry for help went unheard.



**As the platform expanded its reach, its influence garnered global acclaim, with various media outlets showcasing its remarkable accomplishments.**

One of the most remarkable aspects of the 1166 helpline is its accessibility to underserved populations in remote areas of Pakistan. It ensures that vital healthcare information reaches even the most vulnerable communities and enables them to report issues and concerns for speedy resolution. The helpline broke down barriers by providing multilingual support and cultural sensitivity training to its operators, ensuring that individuals from diverse backgrounds had equal access to healthcare information and support. Today, 1166 stands as a testament to the power of dedication, empathy, and unwavering commitment, serving as a source of inspiration for organizations nationwide to connect with public health emergencies and initiatives.

Noteworthy endorsements ranged from prominent figures such as the UNICEF Global chief in official press releases to Mr. Gates himself. Ambassadors from organizations like Rotary International, the European Union, and the Canadian High Commission also took to social media platforms to highlight the platform's impact. Both local and international media coverage showcased heartwarming stories.



----- HUMA SHAUKAT

Initially a modest initiative for EPI & PEI as a foundation of synergy, the Call Centre has evolved into a transformative platform aiding and guiding the vulnerable population for all VDPs. Recognizing the pressing need to bridge the gap in healthcare services, the helpline focuses on catering to the challenges faced by children, adults, and the elderly. Our goal is to address from the basic to complex health issues faced by each individual free of cost, nationwide.

During emergencies, confusion and misinformation often run rampant due to the flood of information from various sources. However, the 1166 helpline acts as a lighthouse of reliable facts in collaboration with prestigious organizations such as PM's-SRIU, NIH, NCOC, EDHI foundation, Rescue-1122, and various provincial helplines. By consolidating information, partners and stakeholders can access credible and timely data, aiding informed decision-making and minimizing panic.

Moreover, the helpline provides authorities with a feedback mechanism, enabling them to assess the effectiveness of their emergency response and adjust strategies accordingly. By systematically documenting information from incoming calls, it contributes valuable data to surveillance, epidemiological studies, disease surveillance, and public health research. This data unveils patterns, trends, and risk factors associated with specific diseases or outbreaks in different regions of Pakistan. Decision-makers utilize this information to design targeted interventions, allocate resources effectively, and formulate impactful policies. The helpline facilitates evidence-based decision-making, ensuring that the public receives the best possible care.

In times of crisis, such as the COVID pandemic, measles-Rubella, typhoid, dengue outbreaks and rising polio cases, the 1166 helpline served as a primary centralized platform, offering up-to-date accurate information to the public. It disseminates essential details for preventive measures, symptom recognition, testing centers, treatment guidelines, and much more. The helpline not only provides guidance but also supports in raising awareness of mental health issues and reducing anxiety during emergencies and otherwise.

During disease outbreaks, the helpline plays a pivotal role by assisting individuals in assessing symptoms and providing initial advice. It serves as a triage system, directing callers to appropriate healthcare facilities for testing and treatment. This early identification of potential cases and contacts helps mitigate the spread of diseases, saving lives and valuable resources. In vaccination campaigns, the helpline becomes instrumental in streamlining appointment scheduling, addressing vaccine hesitancy concerns.

**IN THE EVER-EVOLVING LANDSCAPE OF WORKER MANAGEMENT AND SUPPORT, THE TRANSFORMATIONAL JOURNEY OF THE HELPLINE STANDS OUT AS A SHINING EXAMPLE. BY FINE-TUNING THE WORKER MANAGEMENT RELATIONSHIP AND PROVIDING CRUCIAL ASSISTANCE TO HEALTH WORKERS, A PIVOTAL ROLE IN OVERCOMING HURDLES ENCOUNTERED DURING THEIR WORK**

It provides guidance on post-vaccination care and addresses public queries related to vaccine safety and efficacy. Through its efforts, the helpline ensures the success of immunization efforts across the country. Trained operators, along with a team of doctors, capable of handling various scenarios ranging from medical emergencies like lifesaving training programs to mental health crises and disaster management. Their immediate support and guidance alleviate the burden on emergency services, preventing overcrowding in hospitals and clinics.