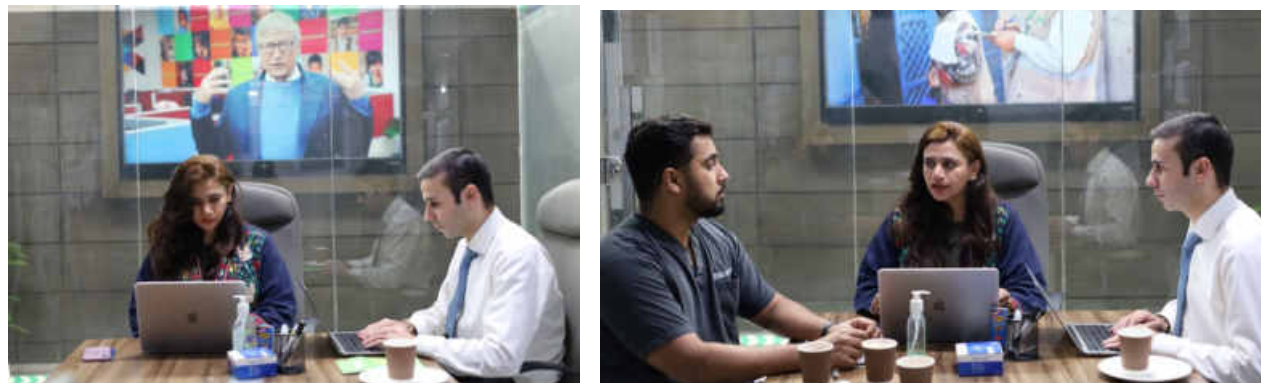


1166 Helpline- Navigating Health Disparities and Inequities during COVID-19 Pandemic and Beyond: A team of medical doctors is permanently stationed at the 1166 Helpline to provide free of cost medical advice. The addition of medical doctors amplified the capacities of this platform to prevent, surveil, detect, respond, notify and follow up Vaccine Preventable Diseases, Poliomyelitis and COVID-19.



Pakistan's 1166 helpline is a toll-free helpline with round the clock functionality, multilateral linkages and sophisticated data management system which implies that anyone can call and speak to health experts without any costs incurred. This makes this service equitably available for all citizens and addresses the financial affordability and accessibility barriers. These two-sided conversations with medical experts enable the worried parents to make informed health decisions for their children by addressing their concerns about vaccines. The medical doctors stationed at 1166 Helpline handle all technical and medical questions beyond the expertise of first-line operators.



DG (Immunization) Dr Muhammad Ahmad Kazi has led creation of multilateral linkages between 1166 Helpline and Surveillance Unit of FDI and NEOC to improve outbreak detection and case-based surveillance.

Thousands of COVID-19 cases and AEFI cases have been investigated managed, documented, and reported to national database by the doctor's team. Speaking to medical doctors dramatically de-escalates anxiety amongst worried parents.



(L) DG Immunisation Dr Kazi receiving briefing from AEFI Focal Person Dr Arooj Iftikhar on AEFI Cases reported during TCV Campaign via 1166 Helpline in Control Room at Federal Directorate of Immunisation (R) Sehat Tahaffuz Helpline Team with GAVI IRC Mission members, 1166 Helpline was transitioned from NEOC to FDI.

“Health for All” can only be attained if there is “Immunization for All” and doctors as most trusted source of health information are promoting vaccine acceptance to achieve that goal.

*1166 helpline is a critical component of public health architecture for **health emergency prevention, preparedness, and response** as it has **strengthened the country’s core capacities** with its unique cross cutting capabilities that were tested and proven during COVID-19 pandemic.*

*As Pakistan plans **to introduce Human Papilloma Virus Vaccine** to prevent and eliminate cervical cancer in the coming years, 1166 Helpline will facilitate new vaccine introduction by answering public queries and concerns.”*

— Director General FDI Dr Muhammad Ahmad Kazi

“AEFI Surveillance is a high priority area for the program to minimize any negative impacts due to newly introduced vaccines such as TCV, MR and COVID-19 since integration of 1166 Helpline with NIMS (National Immunization Management System” **says Dr Kazi.**

AEFI related calls are immediately transferred to medical doctors who obtain detailed medical history to ascertain the nature and severity of adverse event symptoms experienced by the vaccine recipients and triage them as mild, moderate, or severe. For immediate relief, symptom-alleviating medications are prescribed, detailed counselling to reassure and reduce panic. The case is shared with relevant district health officers who assigns it to AEFI focal person who visits the family for on-the-ground facilitation, physical examination, and documentation of medical details on AEFI Reporting forms for causality assessment.

“1166 Helpline can serve as an Early Warning System by not only detecting any disease outbreaks and notifying concerned authorities, it is also operationally capable to respond to infectious disease threats, with tailored preparedness plans in hand and multilateral linkages with programs and institutes such as PEI, EPI, NIH, MoNHSR&C and NCOC.”

- Dr Arooj Iftikhar, Technical Officer 1166 Helpline



Dr Arooj Iftikhar briefing GAVI's IRC Mission Members on role of 1166 Helpline in AEFI, VPD and AFP Surveillance with mechanisms for investigation and response

1166 helpline was proven to be a resilient platform of community engagement, a cost effective and accessible source of bilateral communication between public and health authorities and a crucial partner of the country's response against COVID-19 pandemic due to its robust coordination and collaboration linkages with PEI, EPI, NIH, MoNHR&C and NCOC.

“While the country was weathering the **storms of disease and disaster**, the notifiable infectious disease cases from hard-to-reach areas with accessibility and affordability opportunity barriers were prioritised. **Equity is the centre of FDI's immunisation services and outbreak response efforts especially for those segments of populations that are marginalised and most at risk.** I take pride in how the WHO supported doctors team has enhanced the capacity of this helpline by developing a system that is stable and widely trusted. The first-line operators can forward all medical cases of notifiable vaccine preventable diseases and AEFIs to medical doctors for further handling”

- Dr Ibrahim Yallahow—EPI WHO—Team Lead

1166 Helpline: Role in Mental Health :



Special Assistant to Prime Minister on Health Mr Abdul Qadir Patel accompanied by UNICEF Representative in Pakistan Mr Abdullah Fadil and WHO Representative Dr Palitha Mahipala escorted by Dr Arooj Iftikhar at the entrance steps of 1166 Helpline— His Excellency Mr Patel inaugurated the Integration of 1166 Helpline with Hamraaz Mental Health Initiative in Karachi on 7th April 2023

Mental Health and Psychosocial considerations were given special focus during COVID-19 via 1166 Helpline. During the pandemic, Mental health symptoms were partially exacerbated due to **social distancing, isolation, and large-scale lockdowns**. Alongside physical symptoms, a myriad of mental health symptoms including **clinical depression after loss of a loved one, anxiety disorders, mood disorders, sleep disturbances, loss of appetite, eating disorders, panic attacks and impairment in occupational functioning** were also reported by callers.

Panic Management and Mental Health Support provided by 1166 doctors team during Pandemic: Medical doctors addressed widespread panic and confusion by providing **evidence-based reliable medical information**. Doctors’ teams stationed at the 1166 helpline always aimed at **providing holistic advice with** detailed counselling and reassurance, **coping mechanisms and relaxation techniques**. For Mental health Support - linkages with free hotlines like Rozan and Umang (mental health hotlines) were developed for Referrals to Clinical Psychologists and Psychiatrists.

“There was a widely felt need for a systematic mechanism to address the increase in mental health issues. Launched by SAMP Health Mr Abdul Qadir Patel in April 2023, 1166 helpline is now formally integrated with Mental Health initiative called “Hamraaz” which is an Urdu word for “Confidant”. Says Dr Kazi- DG FDI



After initial screening by 1166 call operators, calls related to mental health issues are screened and forwarded to a pool of mental health experts comprising of clinical psychiatrists and psychologists. The Mental Health disorders have surged after COVID-19 pandemic and FDI team is happy to play their role in combating this burgeoning crisis, **says Dr Kazi, DG FDI**



1166 Helpline: Role in COVID-19 Pandemic:

This team of medical doctors managed thousands of mild COVID-19 cases at homes over free phone calls and in consequence prevented crashing of healthcare delivery system especially when hospital bed occupancy had exceeded its limits and situation was getting out of hands. Most of the calls were received from mothers and caregiving women asking how to protect themselves while caring for family members who had tested positive for COVID-19. Holistic medical advice was provided to such callers including testing, isolation measures, medications, dietary advice, home remedies. Some callers called multiple times until complete resolution of symptoms, completion and safe discontinuation of isolation period. Hundreds of cases of Long COVID Syndrome with multiple cognitive deficits and memory issues, loss of sensations such as smell and taste and fatigue were advised and reported.



SAPM Health Dr Faisal Sultan with the team of medical doctors at 1166 Helpline. (February 2022)

1166 helpline employed tele-health solution to bend the arc of health inequities that persisted and were further deepened by COVID-19 crisis. People from remote and underserved regions shared sordid stories of loss of lives and livelihoods. The doctors team meticulously documented relevant epidemiological data of each case and notified for disease surveillance and contact tracing to help control rapid transmission”

-Dr Rana Safdar—Lead Strategic Advisor IGH-CDC, Former DG Health, NPM EPI and National Coordinator NEOC

Infrastructure and Resources of Pakistan's Polio Eradication Initiative were utilized to launch a robust response against COVID-19 Pandemic.

1166 helpline was initially established by Pakistan Polio Eradication Initiative on recommendations of Technical Advisory Group (TAG) to answer polio related queries in November 2019 but within months of its inception, COVID-19 was declared a global pandemic. Existing infrastructure of Polio Program such as surveillance network, data management system and communication platform such as 1166 was utilised to launch a vigorous response against pandemic.

“ 1166 Helpline helped health authorities to make data driven informed decision making. These doctors perpetually strived to identify cases of Acute Flaccid Paralysis and positive and suspected cases of COVID-19 to provide urgent medical advice followed by on the ground investigation, contact tracing and medical assistance until restoration to improved health. This back up of medical doctors earned credibility and respect to the helpline which is illustrated by high volume of daily call load. “

--Dr. Ibrahim Yallahow – EPI Team Lead WHO Pakistan



1166 Doctors team with NEOC Coordinator Dr Shahzad Baig and DG Immunization Dr Akram Shah

LINKAGES WITH NIMS AND NCOC:

Sehat Tahaffuz Helpline was integrated with the COVID-19 National Immunization management system (NIMS) and NCOC. Citizens were asked to register themselves for COVID-19 vaccines by sending their CNIC to 1166 via text message and call at 1166 Helpline for information on vaccination centers, scheduling, vaccine shortages, etc.

A live dashboard was designed to address the complaint of the public related to COVID-19 vaccines that is displayed in NCOC for immediate action by focal persons. This real-time data and analysis provided to NCOC helped in tracking hot spots for targeted lockdown measures and other decisions to control disease transmission.

1166 Doctors team advised the public on vaccine eligibility with several co-morbidities, chronic diseases, contraindications., travel implications, vaccine efficacy and safety with complex medical and medication history.



In February 2020, when the first case of COVID-19 was reported in Pakistan, a sea of rumours erupted that was influencing the health seeking behaviours of communities, and was spreading as dangerously and as fast as COVID-19 virus itself. To mitigate widespread panic and confusion, **there was an urgent need of a reliable platform for the public to obtain authentic medical information. Public was asked to call 1166 Helpline for medical advice.**

Since the first-line agents did not have any medical background, WHO Pakistan was requested to strengthen the capacity of this helpline with technical backup by trained medical doctors to provide medical guidance according to the latest global and national guidelines.

A team of 10 medical doctors was stationed at the helpline initially to respond to medical, specialized and technical questions, identify cases, assess symptoms and provide Telehealth advice.

Medical advice was sought for type of tests, treatment options, home management of mild cases, handling of Reinfection and Long-Haul COVID-19 Cases, cases with underlying medical conditions.

The number of doctors had to be scaled up to 20 experts when the call volume increased to more than 70,000 calls everyday. **First-line operators were trained to transfer all calls with symptoms of COVID-19, Acute Flaccid Paralysis, Vaccine Preventable Diseases and AEFIs to medical doctors after obtaining basic demographic data on CCMS (Call Centre Management System).**

Then SAPM Health Dr Zafar Mirza with Dr Rana Safdar in conversation with Dr Arooj Iftikhar to assess the linkages of 1166 Helpline doctors' team with District Health Authorities of all districts of Pakistan for COVID-19 case identification, triage and referral to Rapid Response Teams for urgent home testing, isolation and contact tracing



Snapshots of work of 1166 helpline as featured in "Gates Notes" on Bill Gates visit to Pakistan

[. https://www.gatesnotes.com/Last-mile-to-end-polio-in-Pakistan](https://www.gatesnotes.com/Last-mile-to-end-polio-in-Pakistan)

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=qj8c9Imi8tc&t=65s>



High level delegations frequently visited 1166 helpline to interact with frontline health workers who are listening to the communities directly.

1166 helpline is a **transformative example** of how listening to communities patiently is needed to **promote trust on the immunisation programs.**



1166 helpline has **created an all-inclusive space** for **both communities and healthcare workers** to voice their concerns and register their complaints during polio campaigns around the year. An effective **Complaint Management System and Dashboard** was developed , hosted by NEOC's control room to track resolution status of each complaint.



Helpline **bridged gender equity gaps** as **stay-at-home mothers, Nursing and Expectant women** sought advice for protection of their children **during pregnancy and breastfeeding.**

Women asked to speak to female medical doctors for reproductive health issues with COVID-19.



Contributions of 1166 Helpline as Featured on website of Rotary International.

Link:

https://www.endpolio.org/world-polio-day?utm_campaign=&utm_medium=social&utm_profile=Rotary+International+President&utm_source=facebook&fbclid=IwAR1PaQgfs9jHjoU_DusnaXmcpB88VtzbEZmb-iZdPcj5qZn5o2PIJPtL7iU

First female President of Rotary International Jennifer Jones during her visit to 1166 Helpline

Rotary President took a keen interest in role of women in the polio eradication initiative. The role of 1166 Helpline was featured on Rotary International's social media pages.

(<https://www.facebook.com/watch/?v=1114934665803604>)

1166 Helpline- integration with Expanded Program of Immunization

As the threat of COVID-19 declined, the helpline was utilised to support Routine Immunisation and Supplementary Immunisation campaigns including the world's largest MR Campaign that targeted 90 million children in two weeks.



VPD Surveillance: Triage and Timely Referrals to District Health Authorities

AEFI Surveillance and Response:

Most of the mild AEFIs are addressed at the level of the 1166 helpline by providing reassurance, advising symptom-alleviating medications, and referral to the nearest health facilities if warranted.

Callers are encouraged to call again if symptoms exacerbate, or new symptoms appear.

Severe AEFIs are reported to relevant AEFI Focal persons for physical examination, investigation, and response.

Support during Campaigns and SIAs: MR Campaign, TCV Campaign and Pediatric COVID-19 Campaign

Concerns on Immunisation after vaccine,

During TCV and MR campaigns in flood-affected districts, callers sought medical advice related to endemic diseases like malaria, typhoid, dengue, and diarrheal diseases as well.

Synergy between Pakistan's Expanded Program of Immunization and Polio Eradication Initiative is essential to eradicate polio as well as reach zero dose children to improve routine immunization coverage. Though handed over to EPI, 1166 helpline remains a vital node for polio program as both programs continue to benefit from each other.

“Pakistan and Afghanistan are part of last epidemiological block where polio virus is still endemic. All GPEI Partners are focused on the last mile as poliomyelitis is on the verge of eradication. 1166 Helpline's doctors team reports all cases of Acute Flaccid Paralysis to Surveillance unit of NEOC for stool sampling and further investigation to rule out polio.” – Dr Shahzad Baig National Coordinator – NEOC



Chief of Army Staff General Qamar Javed Bajwa with DG ISPR with NEOC Coordinator Dr Shahzad and DG Immunisation Dr Soofia Younas to extend support to both programs



Lt Gen Kashif Nazir, the current E-in-C of Pakistan Army Corps of Engineers, Military Engineering Service, and Frontier Works Organisation visited NEOC and 1166 Helpline to extend his support for the operations of polio eradication initiative.



Dr Waqas Khattak briefing UNICEF Representative Mr Abdullah Fadil accompanied by NEOC Coordinator Dr Shahzad Baig on role of the doctors team at 1166 Helpline.

Dr Khattak is one of the doctors answering technical questions of public at 1166 Helpline since 2020.



The linkages of PEI/EPI with Security Agencies are vital to provide a safe working environment EPI's vaccinators and female front line health workers of Polio Eradication Initiative.

Representatives of Armed Forces of Pakistan frequently visit 1166 Helpline to extend support to polio eradication initiative.

Dr Afifa Younis Raja briefing.



Dr Afifa Younis Raja answering questions of UNICEF Executive Director Catherine Russel.

Catherine Russel took keen interest in 1166 Operations as an accessible and effective platform of Community Engagement.

1166 Helpline- Role in ACSM and Crisis Communication:

Insights collected from the helpline conversations are routinely shared with communication teams to inform “Risk Communication and Community Engagement” activities, initiate Crisis communication response if warranted, and for other ACSM activities as appropriate.



During campaigns, a crisis communication cell is established to monitor the real time situation on the ground, mass media, social media and reports from 1166 helpline. The 1166 doctors team proactively listens and engage with communities to flag any serious AEFIs and complaints that warrants any preemptive crisis communication response. Crisis Communication Cell stays active throughout the campaign and 1166 Technical team plays their contribution through pre-crisis preparation, crisis identification, crisis assessment, and crisis communication.

1166 Doctors team is part of FDI’s ACSM (Advocacy, Communications, Social Mobilisation) Committee

1166 is supporting ACSM activities by increasing awareness of the benefits of immunisation, by correcting false beliefs, rumors, or concerns that prevent people from getting immunised and buy informing people where and when to get immunised.

1166 Helpline as a communication platform has gained significant credibility in the last 3 years. A daily call volume of thousands of calls demonstrates public confidence in the helpline. As an important component of public health infrastructure, the 1166 helpline can also respond to future public health challenges and emergencies. It can help the country track and respond to public health threats by serving as an early warning system.

The harmful effects of health misinformation are routinely mitigated by sharing of evidence-based scientific information in easy-to-understand language. As fake news spreads as fast and proves to be as dangerous as viruses; if left unaddressed leads to confusion and risk-taking behaviours and undermines the trust in health authorities. 1166 doctors team sensitised public for reinforcement of Infection Prevention and Control Measures, use of Personal Protective Equipment and adherence to public health social measures.

1166 Helpline- Role in Risk Communication and Community Engagement:



Dr Arooj Iftikhar Technical Officer 1166 Helpline, **Lieke Visser** WHO Communications Officer and **Mr Hasnain Khalil** RCCE Consultant WHO as members of National RCCE Task Force

in meeting with *Chair of RCCE Task Force* **Dr Zaem ul Haq** TFP EPI Program

to develop a mechanism of **Social Listening and Rumor Tracking** based on helpline conversations.



Misinformation Management Training to mitigate harmful effects of health misinformation.

1166 Helpline in close coordination with RCCE Task force incorporated the **latest tools and approaches** for shared learning and collective action during the COVID-19 pandemic that helped **respond to other public health emergencies** such as measles and cholera outbreaks.



With incessant support of WHO Head of Mission in Pakistan **Dr Palitha Mahipala**,

1166 doctors team performed **rigorous and systematic tracking and analysis of rumours** by employing proactive social listening, **mapping sources of misinformation** and measuring their **reach and impact on health and vaccine seeking behaviours**.

As adequate and appropriate medical information provided is the backbone of any epidemic response, as the **1166 doctors' team** has been a useful addition in this respect.

Capacity Building and Supportive Supervision of 1166 Doctors Team:



Regular refresher trainings were conducted as the situation evolved rapidly.

New scientific information, case management guidelines, new variants and vaccines were emerging on an unprecedented scale.

To keep the knowledge updated and aligned with WHO's guidelines, weekly training sessions were conducted.

Dr Arooj Iftikhar with Federal Training Officer, Mr Bilal Murtaza- recognized for conducting regular trainings for 1166 doctors team.



The Dream Team:

1166 Doctor's team is an interesting blend of Pediatricians, Epidemiologists, Public Health Consultants, General Medical Practitioners, Emergency Medicine Physicians, Surgeons and Family medicine experts.

This overlapping skill set was supplemented and supported with experts from Communications and Surveillance unit of FDI and NEOC.



I was skeptical of benefits of Telehealth when WHO Pakistan recruited me to supervise the team of doctors deputed at 1166 Helpline. Some limitations such as inability to perform a physical examination on the patients, and lack of physical connection, I was uncertain of the extent to which our medical advice could help people telephonically.

Turns out, that most callers did not have any access to a qualified medical doctor, and speaking to a doctors from remote unserved areas solved a lot of their health problems.

We were able to manage COVID-19 patients and mild AEFIs at home with regular follow ups until recovery. Most of the caregivers at home were women with little agency to seek healthcare. Our linkages with rapid response teams at district level enabled us to request home testing and contact tracing for our callers. **Soon, as the cases rose to alarming levels, this work started to feel like a calling.**

I feel proud to work for WHO Pakistan. There is so much room to learn and grow as **Dr. Palitha Mahipala personally focuses to build linkages and to conduct regular refresher trainings for our team.**

- **Dr Arooj Iftikhar- Technical Officer (WHO)**

1166 Helpline as Reflected in Media:

World Polio Day

With your help, we can end polio for good.

www.endpolio.org



LINK: https://www.endpolio.org/world-polio-day?utm_campaign=&utm_medium=social&utm_profile=Rotary+International+President&utm_source=facebook&fbclid=IwAR1PaQgfs9jHjoU_DusnaXmcpB88VtzbEZmb-iZdPcj5qZn5o2PIJPtL7iU

Covid-19 Helpline workers guide millions out of the worst health crisis | The Express Tribune

PESHAWAR: While there is praise for the frontline healthcare workers, there is very little said about those who...

tribune.com.pk



LINK: <https://tribune.com.pk/story/2272888/covid-19-helpline-workers-guide-millions-out-of-the-worst-health-crisis>

Dial-a-vax: Pakistan's 1166 helpline has answers for the country's vaccine questions

Is my child eligibl for the new typhoid conjugate vaccine? I'm living in a flood-zone and I'm spiking a fever. Can my...

www.gavi.org



LINK: <https://www.gavi.org/vaccineswork/dial-vax-pakistans-1166-helpline-has-answers-countrys-vaccine-questions>

Health helpline

"YES, your child is eligible for the measles vaccination. Your information is correct, the vaccine is free, and..."

www.dawn.com

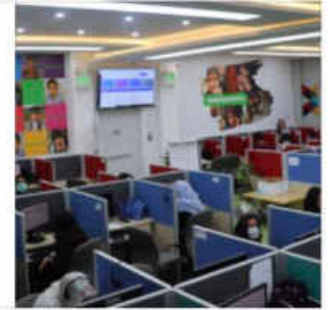


LINK: <https://www.dawn.com/news/1749838>

GPEI-Supporting COVID-19 Response: Call 1166 in Pakistan

"How can I help you?" Pause. "Have you travelled out of the country recently?"
Pause. "Please stay on the line. I am..."

polioeradication.org



LINK: <https://polioeradication.org/news-post/supporting-covid-19-response-call-1166-in-pakistan/>

PTA announces free calls to Ministry of National Health Services helpline | The Express Tribune

Calls that are being made to 1166 helpline are now made free to help people in the midst of coronavirus pandemic Calls...

tribune.com.pk



LINK: <https://tribune.com.pk/story/2184662/8-pta-announces-free-calls-ministry-national-health-services-helpline>

'Need to remove the taboo': On World Health Day, govt launches mental health app and helpline

Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif announced on Friday the launch of the government's "first dedicated mental health app and..."

www.dawn.com



LINK: <https://www.dawn.com/news/1746402>

"SEHAT TAHAFFUZ" 1166 HELPLINE: REACHING PEOPLE WITH LIFESAVING INFORMATION

Background

Professional helplines, whether through phone calls, text or voice messaging, can enhance any health programme. They work to disseminate information, create lines of accountability, respond to rumours and misinformation, allow for direct communication with communities, and collect valuable information about perception and concerns. At their best, they reinforce healthy behaviours and help users make informed decisions.

pandemic. In February 2020, the Health Ministry expanded services to include information about COVID-19. The helpline is now linked with National Immunisation Management System and the National Command Operation Center.

The call centre opened with 55 call staff; today, there are 145 to meet the public demand for information about the pandemic.



LINK: <https://tribune.com.pk/story/2184662/8-pta-announces-free-calls-ministry-national-health-services-helpline>