

# Ministry of Health of Algeria â?? Abdelmalek Boudiaf, Minister of Health

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*Algeriaâ??s Minister of Health Abdelmalek Boudiaf discusses various health policies that have been implemented in Algeria recently, including the introduction of health smartcards, and domestic production incentives.*

**You took up your position in September 2013, and immediately determined that the health sector was in great need of reform. Can you share with us your assessments and describe the first steps that your ministry has taken?**

The subject of public health is a vast topic to discuss, especially when considering its reformation. Our central executives from the Ministry of Health have conducted an audit, according to a one-month monitoring outline. This has enabled us to ensure clear view of the situation in the healthcare system and in all of our hospital facilities (university hospitals, clinics, health centers, etc.). Thus we have defined a roadmap outlining the governmentâ??s priorities. One of these priorities was to steer the system to a return to good practices.

Health is indeed a very sensitive sector, hence the need to focus on education, support and increased awareness of the operators, in order to achieve positive outcomes and put our priorities in motion. Our key set of priorities comprise: organization, management, training, access to medicines as well as vaccines and, last but not least, major investment projects in the private and the public sector.

When looking at public health investments, 18.400 additional beds are coming on-stream following the decision of President Bouteflika and this will include the establishment of 10 new university hospitals. Five of them are already under construction. Moreover, we have opened the sector to private players so they can establish hospitals, a landmark in Algerian history.

**Another aspect of the reform you are spearheading is the overhaul of the CHIFA health smartcard. Could you clarify the intent behind this measure and precisely what you aspire to achieve?**

Indeed, the health card needed a rethink. Previously, the system was fraught with irregularities and redundancy: each visit of a patient to a doctor could result in a new prescription and fresh tests to run cumulative to the previous ones and all at the expense of state coffers. The solution to this lies in better organization and greater scope for physician referrals.

As things stand at present, the role of general practitioner is not influential enough, when he should really be the backbone of the system. Through the new health smart card, "health districts" will provide necessary reorganization and enable us to better understand the needs of the patient. This in turn will enable us to implement effective human and material resource allocation. The most important thing is to provide efficient health coverage to meet the needs of the Algerian patient.

**The Algerian government spends around USD 3 billion merely to cover pharmaceuticals expenditure. How do you assess the effectiveness of this crucial expense?**

Algerian legislation includes three core elements in terms of health issues: free, universal and accessible care. A closer look at the main recorded pathologies reveals that they are similar to those encountered in developed countries, and their incidence rate mirrors that of Europe. Treatments offered to Algerian patients are also similar to those offered in such countries. This expense can, of course, be judged considerable, yet these figures reflect the global increase in drug costs, and also include veterinary products.

**How would you assess the current structure of your department and its effectiveness in achieving its mandate?**

The central issue relates to matters of management, and medium and long term perspectives. Using the example of drug shortages that occurred in 2013, it should be emphasized that nothing analogous has happened within the last 10 months. The Central Hospital Pharmacy (PCH) assumes stockpile management and appropriate distribution in accordance with the resources at its disposal. We addressed this issue and current results give us satisfaction.

Furthermore, we are revisiting the overarching health law so as to provide health staff with legal framework that would allow them more flexibility in terms of management. It will also allow us to best meet the needs of modern Algeria. Our national legislation and regulation must adapt and we need to combine our efforts to this effect.

**Algeria envisions to domestically produce 70 percent of the pharmaceuticals consumed in the country, and also foresees expenditure decreases while enhancing patient access at the same time. How does Algeria intend to achieve these objectives?**

Algeria already has the assets that could lead to national production increase: labor, space, expertise, professionals (nearly 5.000 pharmacists in training), and a growing number of foreign laboratories that come and settle. To achieve such results, it is clear that we will need our foreign partners. No country can claim to self-sufficiency in this regard. In the long term, I focus on the establishment of a coherent policy that will allow not only to meet the country's needs, but also to conquer other markets. We will not remain eternal importers. We have the means and the opportunities at our disposal.

Algeria is now a secure homeland and a solvent country that can offer many more opportunities than other countries in the region. These elements encourage partners to come and invest. On top of that, do not forget that no other country in the world offers what Algeria offers today to investors. They enjoy exclusive benefits, first of which concession, but also five-year exemption from taxes, zoning system, etc. The latest major international group that joined us in strategic partnership is Variant, which is establishing a training center for the entire Africa and Middle East region.

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**In June 2014, Algeria signed a partnership with the United States, as part of its "Algeria 2020 vision" with a view to creating a biotechnology hub for Africa and the Middle East. What makes Algeria the ideal host for this project?**

Its location: situated on the sea, gateway to Africa, and with the Middle East being only three hours away. In addition to Algerian surroundings and context, the university offers a huge labor pool that is talented, but cheaper than in the West. Also our country is solvent. This combination of elements has motivated international investors to join us. Algeria is a secure country, and the Americans are well aware of this. We have excellent relationships with them, especially in the field of health products.

International investors are welcome, our nation is warm and hospitable, and our people are extraordinary. Algeria is like a small continent, with each of the four seasons in every corner of the country. We will encourage and favor the inflow of foreign capital into Algeria. My desire is that the Algerian patient receives the best care out there, and in this regard, our active search for new partnerships is paramount.

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