



The budget, approved to recruit 16,963 health workers nationwide, aims to tackle the severe shortage of medical personnel in public facilities, cutting long patient waiting times. PHOTO/FILE

Inside Uganda's Shs132b plan to end health workers crisis

16,963
WORKERS TO BE
RECRUITED

After years of long queues, overstretched staff, and patients walking kilometres for care, the government has unveiled a Shs132b plan to recruit nearly 17,000 health workers. But will this massive injection of human resource finally heal Uganda's ailing public health system? **Geoffrey Oyet Okwera** reports from Pader, where for patients such as Grace Amony, hope has been a long time coming.

Grace Amony, a single mother in Pader District, walks nearly six kilometres to Okinga Health Centre III in search of treatment. But just as she sighs in relief on reaching the public facility, she is confronted by yet another hurdle: the severe shortage of medical personnel. With only a few health workers available, long queues stretch across the facility's veranda, leaving patients waiting for hours to be attended to.

Despite being in pain, Amony has little choice but to wait. For her and many others in the area, Okinga Health Centre III remains the last and often the only place to seek medical help. Amony's experience mirrors the daily reality in many public health facilities across Uganda: overstretched staff, overwhelmed systems, and patients left waiting hours for care. Sadly, this routine of having too many patients

accompanied by too few health personnel is the order of the day. District health records indicate that in Pader District, only four doctors serve a population of more than 240,000 people, a stark statistic that requires urgent intervention. Stakeholders in northern Uganda have continuously pushed for dialogue to ensure increased health workers at public health facilities. At Okinga Health Centre III, for instance, between 900 and 1,200 patients seek treatment at the facility each month at the Out Patient Department. Pader District Health Officer, Dr Benson Oyoo, says health facilities in the district collectively handle large numbers of deliveries each month, placing immense pressure on maternity services. He, therefore, calls for a deliberate move to recruit more health workers to bridge this healthcare gap. According to reports, public health facilities in Uganda are adversely challenged due to a shortage of doctors relative to a rapidly growing patient population. As of 2025, the health worker-to-population ratio remains well below targets set by the World Health Organisation (WHO), with reports highlighting that the few available doctors are struggling with excessively high workloads. This has often culminated in compromised care, staff burnout, and overcrowded facilities. **Ray of hope** Following several appeals from stakeholders to address this critical health worker staffing shortage, the government has moved to curb the shortage through parliamentary funding approvals. A sum of Shs132.6b has been earmarked to support the

hiring of more health workers. This funding is part of a broader effort to strengthen service delivery, which includes Shs20b for upgraded facilities and more than Shs15b for the national organ transplant programme. The approved budget to recruit 16,963 health workers across the country is aimed at addressing the critical shortage of medical personnel in public health facilities during the 2026/2027 financial year. According to a report by the Ministry of Public Service on the state of human resources in the public service, the health sector had an approved establishment of 154,190 positions as of December 2024. However, only 48,113 positions had been filled, representing just 31 percent of the required workforce and leaving a 69 percent vacancy rate. Data further shows that between 2020 and 2024, the health sector recruited 9,482 staff. Of these, about 8,108 (85 percent) were deployed to primary healthcare facilities, while 1,374 (15 percent) were assigned to referral hospitals. The annual sector health performance report of 2025 shows that public health facilities are operating at only 34 percent of the approved staffing norms, far below the expected level and a major constraint to health service delivery. WHO recommends a minimum of 4.45 doctors, nurses and midwives per 1,000 people as a threshold for delivering essential health services. This latest recruitment also comes at a critical time following disruptions that affected programmes supported by the United States Agency for International Development. The government has launched a parallel process to absorb about 18,100 of these professionals onto the national payroll. Under a \$2.3 billion health cooperation agreement signed in December 2025, the US will

“Capacity Although the government's decision to recruit more health workers is commendable, Uganda still faces a significant shortage across many public health facilities. We must treat investment in healthcare as a national development priority, because a healthy population directly contributes to economic productivity and growth. A healthy citizenry is a catalyst for development: when people are healthy, they can work, innovate, and contribute to the country's Gross Domestic Product,” says Dr Jackson Nkeramihigo.