

Providers must navigate several annual bureaucratic processes in order to maintain their registration with the National Health Insurance Agency (NHIA) and the Health Facilities Registration Authority (HeFRA). These processes are burdensome for both providers and regulators and, in response, Marie Stopes International Ghana (MSIG) has stepped in as a facilitator to improve efficiency.



This snapshot documents the strategies MSIG has used to facilitate easier registration and renewal processes for BlueStar providers; improving process efficiency and supporting the retention of small private providers in the NHIS.



Intervention

More than 85% of facilities in the BlueStar network are registered to deliver services under the NHIS scheme. As such, they are required to be licensed by HeFRA before they can obtain their NHIA credentialing (registration) or renewal. In order to continue to do so, there are a number of regulatory licensing/registration processes providers must complete:

What is required to operate within the NHIS?

Application for (and annual renewal of) a facility license with HeFRA. HeFRA licensing is a pre-requisite for NHIS accreditation. It involves the completion of an application package and a facility inspection. The process requires in-person presentation of documents, such as a Ghana National Fire Service certificate, a block plan of the facility, Environmental Protection Agency Certificate amongst others and a range of other health professional certificates and updated Provider PINs from the Nurses and Midwifery Council. As HeFRA offices are located only in Accra, many providers with remote facilities must travel up to 13 hours to submit their applications; if they do not initially meet requirements, providers may have to make this journey multiple times before successfully receiving or renewing their license.

Annually renew their health professional's PIN, linked to their medical professional license. Every health professional requires a professional identification number (PIN) to operate. This is administered by the Nurses and Midwifery Council. Each member of staff must have an updated PIN at all times, and these must be submitted when applying for a HeFRA license or NHIS accreditation.

Register (and re-register) with NHIS every two years. NHIS accreditation is initially valid for 5 years, and thereafter must be renewed every 2 years, completing statutory requirements by the agency six months before date of expiry. Many of the documents demanded by HeFRA are also requirements of the NHIS accreditation process, including the submission of valid staff PINs.



Intervention

The burden of time and resources it takes for providers to compile and submit registration documentation is significant enough that Marie Stopes Ghana stepped in to facilitate these processes and bring registration to their doorsteps. MSIG works with providers and agencies to:

- Disseminate clear information about regulatory requirements.
- Monitor provider and facility due dates for PIN numbers, NHIS reaccreditation, and the status of HeFRA licenses.
- Collect paperwork and submit required documents in batches to the respective licensing and insurance bodies.

MSIG conducted a survey in April 2018 to learn more about provider experiences with HeFRA and better tailor their support.



Results

80% of facilities found the process **cumbersome**, with **inadequate information sharing between HeFRA and providers**, and with concerns that this may **delay NHIS accreditation**. Providers also reported challenges in **obtaining the necessary certificates** (eg. From the Environmental Protection Agency, Fire Service, District Assembly) required for submission to HeFRA, and stressed the difficulty of **travelling into Accra** to access HeFRA's offices.

In response, MSIG began a series of activities to better support providers in this process. MSIG now facilitates the HeFRA licensing process for all BlueStar facilities by:

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- Enabling the migration of facility information onto the new HeFRA database.
- Delivering and following up on submissions to reduce the time burden on providers.
- Clarifying communication between HeFRA and facilities to ease the process for both sides.
- Handling the transportation of applications and follow up documents to the Accra office, reducing travel costs and time for providers.
- Submitting documents in bulk. (This has proven so effective that HeFRA assigned a designated officer to handling BlueStar cases.)

In 2018, with the support of MSIG, **119 healthcare providers had their PINs renewed**, **6 facilities became NHIS accredited for the first time**, and **20 renewed their NHIS accreditation**. Furthermore, of the 96 BlueStar facilities in the network, **63 received the updated HeFRA details through the correctional form** and 33 are in the process of doing so. 7 new providers were licensed with HeFRA for the first time and 21 providers were migrated onto the new HeFRA platform.

"We know BlueStar stands for quality" - HeFRA.

"BlueStar has helped us to know what to do to pass both [HeFRA and NHIA] inspections. If you take the BlueStar assessment seriously, you will be a shining star" - Alidor Maternity Home.

"All I had to do was to be at a 13 hour distance and supply BlueStar with all my documentation, and I was sorted with my HeFRA and NHIA accreditation" - Quality Medical, Bawku.

"Thanks to BlueStar for my facility's upgrade to clinic status" - Bethel Maternity Home.



Lessons Learned

- By stepping in as an intermediary, MSIG has demonstrated the value social franchise networks (SFNs) can add by facilitating processes and smoothing the way for both providers and regulatory and insurance bodies. MSIG’s role has grown to that of a trusted advisor, sitting in and providing input to policy discussions that could affect the SFN.
- Many of the demands made by HeFRA and the NHIS in their respective licensing and accreditation processes are duplicative, for example, the submission of block plans, fire certificates, and staff PINs. This presents an inefficiency in the work of these two public bodies. It is also a cost and time burden for providers, distracting from focus on client care. The manual nature of these processes is also prone to human error.
- By opening more regional offices, the regulatory body could relieve a significant time and cost burden, and be much more accessible to providers.



Outlook

The intermediary role played by MSIG will continue to play a large part of their strategy, forming a crucial element of the BlueStar value proposition to franchisees.

This intermediary role has not only benefited private providers within the network, but is also valued by HeFRA. Deepened collaboration now exists between HeFRA and MSIG, particularly regarding the licensing process. HeFRA will continue to have a dedicated officer assigned to handling BlueStar provider applications.

This demonstrates the evolving role that social franchising can play within the health system, not simply as an aggregator for the fragmented private sector, but as a key partner and advisor to regulatory and insurance bodies, strengthening the wider health system.