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Laurier professor examines role of private-sector health services in developing countries

WATERLOO – While the private sector plays a large role in providing treatment for common childhood illnesses in low- and middle-income countries, the use of private enterprises varies across countries and health services, says **Karen Grépin**, assistant professor of [Health Sciences](#) at Wilfrid Laurier University.

Grépin recently published an article titled, "[Private Sector An Important But Not Dominant Provider Of Key Health Services in Low- And Middle-Income Countries](#)," in the scientific journal *Health Affairs*. Her study contributes to the continuing debate over how the private sector can provide health services in developing countries and how it can help achieve the goal of universal health coverage.

"There is tremendous variation in private-sector use across countries and health services," said Grépin. "Urban and wealthier women are more likely to use the private sector, compared to rural and poorer women. The private sector plays an important role in increasing coverage, but strategies to further engage the sector, if they are to be effective, will need to take into consideration this difference in its use."

Using data from 205 discrete demographic and health surveys in 70 countries between 1990 and 2013, Grépin analyzed the use of the private sector for the treatment of diarrhea, fever or cough in children, prenatal care and institutional deliveries, and as a source of modern contraception for women.

Private providers were the main source of treatment for childhood illnesses, but not for other services she examined. The study also found no evidence of increased use of private-sector health services over time.

A recent addition to Laurier's Department of Health Sciences, Grépin plans to continue her study of the economics of health-service delivery in developing countries, with a focus on sub-Saharan Africa.

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