



Fiji consists of an archipelago of more than 330 islands, of which about 110 are permanently inhabited which makes it harder for health services to reach. Picture: WWW.WORLDGEOGRAPHY150.WORDPRESS.COM/

# Access to health care

**W**HAT is “health access” or “access to health care” means?

Access is a complex concept to define in terms of health but is an important concept for an organisation financing and delivering of healthcare services in any country.

If services are available and there is an adequate supply of services, then the opportunity to obtain health care exists, and a population may ‘have access’ to services.

The extent to which a population “gains access” may also depend on financial, organisational and social or cultural barriers that limit the utilisation of services.

Thus access is measured in terms of utilisation dependent on the affordability, physical accessibility and acceptability of services and not merely the adequacy of supply.

Therefore, accessibility of health care services in an urban setting in Fiji will totally differ to a rural setting far in the interior of Fiji or out in the islands.

Imagine delivering health services to a population dispersed across dozen of island groups and atolls, covering a distances of up to 5000 kilometres or more, with slow or no internet, extremely high operational costs as well as infrequent transport links via air or sea.

This is the reality of many Pacific Island Countries (PICs) including Fiji that face such a unique logistical and financial challenge in designing and delivering health care, where and when they are needed by

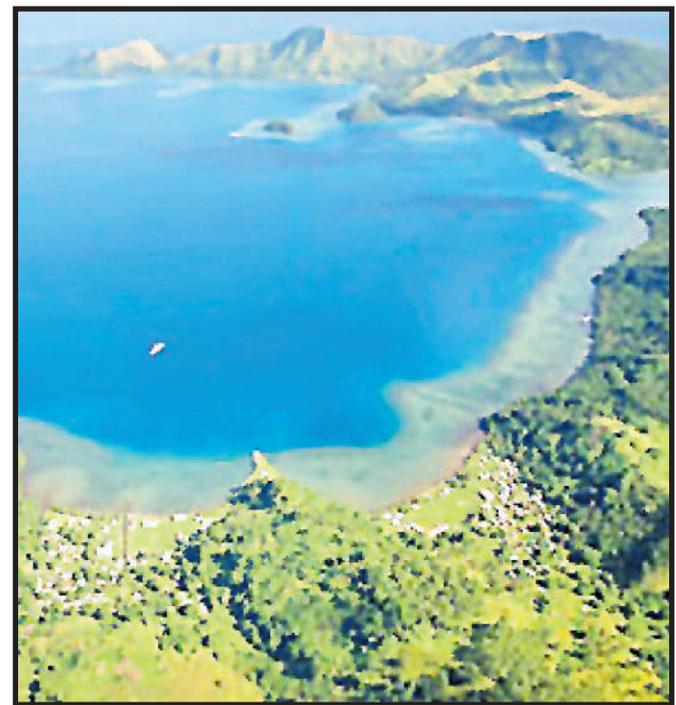
their people.

The 21 Pacific Island Countries and territories are: American Samoa, Cook Islands, Federated States of Micronesia, Fiji, French Polynesia, Guam, Kiribati, Marshall Islands, Nauru, New Caledonia, Niue, Northern Mariana Islands, Palau, Papua New Guinea, Samoa, Solomon Islands, Tokelau, Tonga, Tuvalu, Vanuatu and Wallis & Futuna.

World Health Organization’s definition of health workers are people whose job is to protect and improve the health of their communities; and the WHO 2020 data showed that 12 out of 21 PICs have met the goal of 4.5 health workers per 1000 population; and while the global average total health expenditure per capita is about \$US1000 (\$F2247.18) per year, 10 out of 19 PICs spend \$US500 (\$F1123.59) or less per capita per year.

In a study done by Junling Wang in 2007 in the US in regards to Asian American and Pacific Islanders and their access to health services, showed the under-utilisation of the health services by these minorities, are primarily because of numerous cultural barriers, language barriers and inadequate health insurance; however, continued efforts to address these problems are still needed.

■ Dr Isoa Siliasau is a general practitioner at Oceania Hospitals Pte Ltd. The views expressed are his and not necessarily shared by this newspaper.



The Lau group is a place not seen by many because of its remoteness. Picture: Keith Ellenbogen/www.livingoceansfoundation.org

