

Civil society call to action on universal health coverage



Does your organisation want to join the UHC movement?

Healthcare around the world is unaffordable for millions of people. However, states are responsible for delivering universal access to health systems according to their legal commitments to the Right to Health. This is only possible if they develop sustainable health financing mechanisms to support strong and equitable national health systems.

To make Universal Health Coverage (UHC) a reality, there is still the need for greater political will both at national level - to put in practice the reforms needed - and at international level to promote and revitalise a general consensus towards 'health for all', facilitating technical

support and additional resources. Making progress towards UHC will accelerate social and economic growth, is fundamental to sustainable development and is fair.

For these reasons, a group of NGOs has been working on a common statement for UHC, asking for greater political support and promoting a joint movement for UHC.

If your organisation wants to strengthen this global movement for UHC and endorse this document, please contact us at:
coordination@actionforglobalhealth.eu.

Around the world, the cost of healthcare continues to prevent poor people from seeking care and at the same time pushes millions into poverty each year.

- Every year, catastrophic health costs push 100 million people into poverty¹.
- Only 1 in 5 people has social security protection that will cover lost wages in the event of illness².

Hardship due to health costs can reverse a family's path to resilience: assets are sold, savings are wiped out, children are taken out of school, women give up gainful employment to provide healthcare, and social networks are strained due to unpaid loans and repeated requests for help. Catastrophic health costs can kick-start an intergenerational cycle of poverty.

Universal health coverage is a fundamental instrument to realise the right to health and promote social cohesion. People in good health can learn, earn and contribute to the economic growth of their country. In this way it helps to reduce poverty, inequality and support sustainable development. Equitable health financing systems contribute to progress across all areas of development.

Now is the time for government at all levels and world leaders to prioritise equitable health financing to deliver health for all. Making progress towards universal access to health services is fundamental to go beyond the Millennium Development Goals to fulfil the right to health and to accelerate social and economic growth. In 1978, at the International Conference on Primary Health Care, World leaders promised to deliver health for all. Later in 2000 they promised to achieve the health Millennium Development Goals by 2015. They continue to make targets related to global health. We will continue to fail until governments and world leaders provide leadership on health financing and efficient and equitable health services and ensure that poor and vulnerable groups are protected from costs and risks³.

Universal Declaration of Human Rights

(Article 25)

Everyone has the right to a standard of living adequate for the health and well-being of her/himself and of her/his family, including food, clothing, housing and medical care and necessary social services, and the right to security in the event of unemployment, sickness, disability, widowhood, old age or other lack of livelihood in circumstances beyond his control⁴.

What is universal health coverage?

Universal coverage for health is when all people have access to health services (promotion, prevention, treatments and rehabilitation), without fear of falling into poverty.

Health coverage is determined not only by the direct cost of health services to the patient, but the financing mechanism that is used to pay for it, for example through user fees or progressive public financing from tax income including specific taxes for health financing, etc.

Indirect costs such as transportation, lost opportunities, job insecurity and childcare, also influence uptake of health services, as well as cultural and social norms. The availability of health services, the quality of care and predictability of costs that will be incurred also influence health care coverage.

In the 2010 World Health Report on health financing, Margaret Chan notes, "continued reliance on direct payments, including user fees, is by far the greatest obstacle to progress [to universal coverage]." Thus, in order to advance universal access to health care, the international community must support developing countries to raise funds for health, reduce reliance on out of pocket payments, especially through the elimination of user fees, and promote risk pooling in the form of an increased proportion of public financing for health spent more efficiently and equitably.

¹ World Health Organisation (2010) Health systems financing: The path to universal health coverage. World Health Report.

² Ibid.

³ All WHO Member States have signed up to the declaration of World Health Assembly resolution 58.33 in 2005 and have tasked WHO to develop an action plan to implement the 2010 World Health Report.

⁴ Universal Declaration of Human Rights (1948).



Equitable financing for health care is not sufficient for achieving universal health coverage, but it is an important part.

We, the below-named civil society organisations, believe that everyone can take at least one strong step to move towards universal health coverage.

In this regard, we recommend that:

Political and world leaders

- Highlight the importance of universal health coverage in global and regional debates on development and in meetings on health and social development.
- Ensure that universal health coverage is incorporated into the post-MDG framework.
- Demand global indicators, which need to include equity and gender dimensions, on universal health coverage, to ensure we are making progress.
- Provide long-standing technical and financial resources in order to support national efforts to remove direct payments and move towards UHC.

Governments and ministries of health

- Work with development partners and technical experts to explore policy options and develop a context-specific equitable health service organisation and financing framework.
- Prioritise steps that will make healthcare free, especially for the poorest and most vulnerable at the point and time of use, including strategies to promote equitable financing and greater risk pooling in the form of progressive public spending for health.
- Increase domestic health budgets and per capita public expenditure on health⁵
- Strengthen health financing systems and increase efficiency within the health sector.

- Ensure appropriate measures are taken to come up with national schemes that support efforts to ensure universal health coverage for all. Whatever the national schemes chosen, large government contributions, through progressive taxation, are key to ensure coverage of all the population, including the poorest and most vulnerable people in low-income countries.
- Establish strong national and primary public healthcare systems and improve availability and access to health services in close consultation with communities and civil society organizations, including vulnerable groups.
- Work with other sectors to tackle the social determinants of health and other barriers to healthcare, including water and sanitation, health worker shortages, weak infrastructure, job security and social protection mechanisms more broadly.

• Civil society

Work with governments, development partners, academic and research institutions to:

- Develop and share local and international evidence on successful strategies to achieve universal health coverage to support the development of health systems and financing policies and strategies.
- Support the effective implementation of policies and strategies developed through country led approaches that protect the health of the population particularly the poor and vulnerable
- Mobilise social capital and build consensus around the implementation of effective policies and strategies including their financing through the harmonization and alignment of various programmes and sources of health financing.
- Monitor and evaluate international, national and local-level implementation of commitments to attaining universal health coverage in countries.

All: Demand that universal health coverage is included in the next post-MDG development framework and the sustainable development goals.

⁵ In April 2001, African Union countries meeting in Abuja, Nigeria, pledged to increase government funding for health to at least 15%.

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This initiative is led by:

