



# ICPCM Newsletter

## May 2018

### Universal Health Coverage (UHC)

Tesfamicael Ghebrehwet, MPH, PhD

Board Director, International College of Person Centered Medicine  
Former Nursing and Health Policy Officer, International Council of Nurses

#### Introduction

UHC means that all people and communities receive the health services they need without suffering financial hardship. In implementing UHC, everyone everywhere has a right to benefit from health services they need without falling into poverty when using them. UHC enables all people to access the services that address the most important causes of disease and death and ensures that the quality of those services is good enough to improve the health of the people who receive them [1].

A number of the 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) adopted by the United Nations General Assembly in September 2015 have targets that relate to health. However, one goal – SDG 3 – focuses specifically on ensuring healthy lives and promoting well-being for all. Target 3.8 of SDG 3 – achieving universal health coverage (UHC), including financial risk protection, access to quality essential health-care services and access to safe, effective, quality and affordable essential medicines and vaccines for all – is the key to attaining the entire goal as well as the health-related targets of other SDGs. [2]

#### Global support for universal health coverage

Global support for universal health coverage was launched by a unanimous resolution of the United Nations General Assembly that emphasizes health as an essential element of international development. The resolution, adopted on 12 December 2012, urges governments to move towards providing all people with access to affordable, quality health-care services.

It recognizes the role of health in achieving international development goals and calls for countries, civil society and international organizations to include universal health coverage in the international development agenda. The resolution reaffirms WHO's leading role in supporting countries to respond to the challenges of implementing universal health coverage. This concept has been increasingly recognized in international fora since WHO published the *World health report 2010*, entitled *Health systems financing: the path to universal coverage*.

Health is an important cross-cutting policy issue in the international agenda, as it is a precondition and an outcome and indicator of all three dimensions of sustainable development. The resolution calls on Member States to adopt a multisectoral approach and to work on the social, environmental and economic determinants of health to reduce inequities and enable sustainable development [3].

## Why UHC?

Some facts and figures about the current state of UHC today show that:

- At least half of the world's people are currently unable to obtain essential health services.
- Almost 100 million people are being pushed into extreme poverty, forced to survive on just \$1.90 or less a day, because out-of-pocket payments for health services.
- Over 800 million people (almost 12 percent of the world's population) spend at least 10 percent of their household budgets on health expenses for themselves, a sick child or other family member. They incur so-called "catastrophic expenditures".
- Incurring catastrophic expenses for health care is a global problem. In richer countries in Europe, Latin America and parts of Asia, which have achieved high levels of access to health services, increasing numbers of people are spending at least 10 percent of their household budgets on out-of-pocket health expenses [4].

Universal Health Coverage (UHC) is central to achieving better health and well-being for all people at all ages. It delivers a continuum of services comprising disease prevention, health promotion, and treatment for communicable and noncommunicable diseases, while ensuring that individuals are not driven into poverty because of high costs.

UHC is not an end in itself: its goal is to improve the chances of every person attaining the highest level of health and well-being and contributing to socioeconomic and sustainable development. Attaining UHC is thus essential to every nation's economic productivity, health security, social stability – and to every individual's well-being, security, and productivity.

Countries that invest in UHC make a sound investment in their human capital. In recent decades, UHC has emerged as a key strategy to make progress towards other health-related and broader development goals. Access to essential quality care and financial protection not only enhances people's health and life expectancy, it also protects countries from epidemics, reduces poverty and the risk of hunger, creates jobs, drives economic growth and enhances gender equality.

## Monitoring progress towards UHC

Despite some progress, there is still a long way to go to achieving UHC by 2030 - *the* global commitment under the sustainable development goals (SDGs). The United Nations Statistical Commission in March 2017, adopted two indicators to monitor progress towards SDG target 3.8 on UHC, namely the coverage of essential health services (SDG indicator 3.8.1) and the proportion of households with large expenditures on health as a portion of total household consumption or income (SDG indicator 3.8.2) [5].

## Conclusions

The concept of Universal Health Coverage is congruent with the work and mission of the ICPCM in that targets and goals are set to impact on the social, economic and environmental dimensions of human development. The ICPCM values of equity, universal health coverage and person-and people -centeredness are paramount in the achieving UHC and thus relevant to

ICPCM. To this end the ICPCM endeavours to address the UHC through its journal, conferences and international congresses [6]. The World Health Organization and the different health profession associations are key partners of ICPCM in achieving UHC.

## References

[1] World Health Organization: World Health Day – 2018, campaign materials <http://www.who.int/campaigns/world-health-day/2018/en/>

[2] WHO and World Bank: TRACKING UNIVERSAL HEALTH COVERAGE: 2017 GLOBAL MONITORING REPOR. [www.WHO, int](http://www.WHO.int))

[3] United Nations, General Assembly, Sixty-seventh session: Resolution adopted by the General Assembly on 12 December 2012 (A/67/L.36): Global health and foreign policy, Agenda item 12312-48346.

[4] Hogan, D.R., Stevens,G. A., Hosseinpoor, A. R. , Boerma,T. : Monitoring universal health coverage within the Sustainable Development Goals: development and baseline data for an index of essential health services.13 Dec, 2017. DOI: [https://doi.org/10.1016/S2214-109X\(17\)30472-2](https://doi.org/10.1016/S2214-109X(17)30472-2)

[5] WHO/World Bank. <http://www.who.int/mediacentre/news/releases/2015/uhc-report/en/>

[6] Cloninger CR, Salvador-Carulla L, Kirmayer, LJ, Schwartz MA, Appleyard J, Goodwin N, Groves J, Hermans MHM, Mezzich JE, van Staden CW, Rawaf S: A Time for Action on Health Inequities: Foundations of the 2014 Geneva Declaration on Person- and People-centered Integrated Health Care for All. International Journal of Person Centered Medicine 4: 69-89, 2014.