



# COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT

A health promotion guide for universal health coverage in the hands of the people





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# Preface



“A strong primary health care platform with integrated community engagement within the health system is the backbone of universal health coverage.”<sup>a</sup>

Health promotion – recast and reinterpreted to augment revitalization of primary health care toward universal health coverage (UHC) – can improve the health of at least a billion people as envisioned in the 13th General Programme of Work 2019–2023 of the World Health Organization (WHO).

WHO was created to uphold better health for *all people*. Through the years, driving forces for health such as globalization, rapid and unplanned urbanization, environmental degradation, demographic ageing, infectious disease outbreaks, the growing epidemic of noncommunicable diseases and climate change have increased disparities, making the mandate for health equity more relevant than ever before.

The Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) articulate UHC as one of its outcomes and provides a unique opportunity to place health promotion at the centre of the social development. The SDGs have also created new political space for health promotion. While multisectoral action for health has been pursued for decades, there is unprecedented opportunity to work with other sectors through the SDGs to secure the requisites for health. However, global advocacy for the SDGs and UHC needs to be supported by action on the ground.

How can UHC be placed in the hands of the people?

Community engagement is the key.

Using the five health promotion actions described in the Ottawa Charter – namely: (i) developing personal skills, (ii) strengthening community action, (iii) creating supportive environments, (iv) building healthy public policy, and (v) reorienting health systems – a platform for community engagement can be constructed in any setting.

All or any of these health promotion actions can be used in a setting or locality to create the “glue” – community engagement – that ties communities to the UHC agenda and the SDGs.

Member States have used ‘healthy settings’ (i.e. places where people live, work, learn and play – whether they are cities, islands, schools, marketplaces or even hospitals) to be the interface between communities and the health system.

A renewed engagement with communities and healthy settings with a sharper focus on equity, inclusion and social coherence will place UHC into the hands of the people.

It is always tempting to seek complex solutions to complex problems. However, revisiting health promotion actions provides simple and practical reference points for fresh initiatives for participation.

It is my earnest hope that this guide will inspire local leaders around the world to unleash the power of communities to achieve irreversible change in UHC.

Let us use “work with communities” to promote health and achieve health for all, everywhere.

<sup>a</sup> Ghebreyesus TA. All roads lead to universal health coverage. *Lancet Glob Health*. 2017;5(9):e839–e840.

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**Coordinating department:**

Department of Health Promotion, Ruediger Krech, Faten Ben Abdelaziz

**Principal writer:**

Susan Mercado

**Other contributors and reviewers:**

- Hassan Sami Adnan, Rahim Taghizadeh Asl, Nanne de Vries, Stef Kremers, Lotte Prevo, Francine Schneider and Pete Milos Venticich of the Department of Health Promotion from the Faculty of Health, Medicine and Life Sciences at Maastricht University, Rebecca Daltry, Scarlett Storr and Jenny Westad.

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# Acronyms

CCHE	Communities Creating Healthy Environments Initiative
CDSMP	Chronic Disease Self-Management Program
PAR	participatory action research
SDG	Sustainable Development Goals
SES	socioeconomic status
UN	United Nations
UHC	universal health coverage
WHO	World Health Organization

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