

DEVELOPING A NATIONAL HEALTH FINANCING STRATEGY: A REFERENCE GUIDE



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World Health
Organization

HEALTH FINANCING GUIDANCE NO 3

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For further information about our work on health financing policy please visit our website: www.who.int/health_financing

Cover artwork: original oil painting entitled "Made in Japan" by Fabrice Sergent

HOW TO USE THIS DOCUMENT

This document is based on WHO's experience providing support on health financing policy to its Member States over many years. As a Reference Guide, it proposes an outline for a health financing strategy, but its primary aim is to highlight the different aspects of health financing policy which need to be analysed and addressed by countries. Any successful health financing strategy is rooted in an analysis of current performance problems in the health sector; conducting such an analysis is the focus of a separate document (see details below), and hence this Reference Guide should be used in conjunction with it:

McIntyre D. & Kutzin, J. Health financing country diagnostic: a foundation for national strategy development. Geneva: World Health Organization; 2016. (Health Financing Guidance No 1). Available at http://www.who.int/health_financing

1. INTRODUCTION

1.1. HEALTH FINANCING AND UNIVERSAL HEALTH COVERAGE

Universal health coverage (UHC) means that all people in a society are able to obtain the health services that they need, of high-quality, without fear that the cost of paying for these services at the time of use will push them into severe financial hardship. UHC has become a major policy priority in many countries, and a significant and growing focus of attention at the international level, forming one of the targets of Sustainable Development Goal 3.^{1,2,3,4}

Consistent with the core messages of the World Health Report 2010, many countries have committed to UHC and are as a result reviewing, analysing, and modifying health financing arrangements in their countries. Experience shows that progress towards UHC needs not only strong political commitment but also a coherent strategy which ensures that the different aspects of the health system are aligned and coordinated with each other in order to address core performance challenges effectively. A coherent and well-

WHO's thinking on the development of health financing strategies is rooted in its approach to health financing policy, as illustrated in Figure 1 below.

This approach combines a normative set of goals that are embedded in the concept of UHC (equity in utilization or service use relative to need, financial protection, and quality) with a descriptive framework of the functions and policies that are part of all health financing arrangements. As our normative position, making progress towards the goal of UHC *should* therefore drive reforms in health financing. As reflected in Figure 1, health financing reforms can also influence progress towards the UHC goals indirectly through a set of intermediate objectives: equity in the distribution of health system resources, efficiency, and transparency and accountability.⁵

The UHC goals and intermediate objectives depicted in Figure 1 are generic and broad; to provide a clear agenda for country-specific reforms it is essential to first conduct a diagnosis of current health system performance, the specific ways that

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