



TRACKING UNIVERSAL HEALTH COVERAGE

FIRST GLOBAL MONITORING REPORT



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Preface

Universal health coverage (UHC) means that all people receive the quality, essential health services they need, without being exposed to financial hardship.

A significant number of countries, at all levels of development, are embracing the goal of UHC as the right thing to do for their citizens. It is a powerful social equalizer and contributes to social cohesion and stability. Every country has the potential to improve the performance of its health system in the main dimensions of UHC: coverage of quality services and financial protection for all. Priorities, strategies and implementation plans for UHC will differ from one country to another.

Moving towards UHC is a dynamic, continuous process that requires changes in response to shifting demographic, epidemiological and technological trends, as well as people's expectations. But in all cases, countries need to integrate regular monitoring of progress towards targets into their plans.

In May 2014, the World Health Organization and the World Bank jointly launched a monitoring framework for UHC, based on broad consultation of experts from around the world. The framework focuses on indicators and targets for service coverage – including promotion, prevention, treatment, rehabilitation and palliation – and financial protection for all. This report provides the first global assessment of the current situation and aims to show how progress towards UHC can be measured.

A majority of countries are already generating credible, comparable data on both health service and financial protection coverage. Nevertheless, there are data blind spots on key public health concerns such as the effective treatment of noncommunicable diseases, the quality of health services and coverage among the most disadvantaged populations within countries.

UHC is a critical component of the new Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) which include a specific health goal: *“Ensure healthy lives and promote wellbeing for all at all ages”*. Within this health goal, a specific target for UHC has been proposed: *“Achieve 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”*. In this context, the opportunity exists to unite global health and the fight against poverty through action that is focussed on clear goals. Supporting the right to health and ending extreme poverty can both be pursued through universal health coverage.

The focus on UHC as part of the SDG agenda has much to offer. First, it provides a platform for an integrated approach within the health sector. The broad set of 13 targets for health, as well as health elements in many other targets, are justifiably broad but should not lead to the fragmented silo approaches that characterized much of the health MDGs.

Second, the SDGs and UHC are intrinsically about improving equity. Policies, programmes and monitoring should focus on progress among the poorest people, women and children, people living in rural areas and from minority groups. Using UHC as a common monitoring platform ensures a continuous focus on health equity.

Third, the health goal is closely linked to many of the other social, economic and environmental SDGs. Intersectoral action, including a major emphasis on promotion and prevention, are urgently needed. To end poverty and boost shared prosperity, countries need robust, inclusive economic growth. To drive growth, they need to build human capital through investments in health, education, and social protection for all their citizens. To free the world from extreme poverty by 2030, countries must ensure that all their citizens have access to quality, affordable health services.

While meeting the monitoring demands of these new objectives may be daunting, it also presents an opportunity to focus on strengthening country health information and research systems, using an integrated, comprehensive approach based on each country's individual needs. This requires solid, transparent monitoring and review systems, as well as regular implementation and service delivery research that jointly feed an ongoing learning process of UHC implementation. Both health information systems and the science of service delivery require more investment but, if results are translated into targeted action, that investment will yield major resource savings while also advancing the UHC endeavour.

As challenging as the monitoring task may be, we are not starting from zero. There is already a strong foundation of health indicators to build upon, and a wealth of national and international experience. Much of this experience is built on the work done tracking the MDGs, but is increasingly focused on a more comprehensive approach that also includes NCDs and injuries.

Enhanced and expanded monitoring of health under the SDGs should seek to build on that experience, sharpening our focus on the key health service and financial protection interventions that underpin UHC. Effective UHC tracking is central to achieving the global goals for poverty alleviation and health improvement set by the World Bank Group and WHO. Without it, policy-makers and decision-takers cannot say exactly where they are, or set a course for where they want to go. They cannot know whether they are focussing their efforts in the right areas, or whether their efforts are making a difference.

Monitoring is thus fundamental to the achievement of UHC objectives. It will also be vital to the realization of the SDGs. This report is a critical step to show how monitoring progress can be done, telling us what the state of coverage of interventions and financial protection is and telling us where to focus most.

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