



## Press Release: International Universal Health Coverage Day

### Global Community Calls for Urgent Action Together to Achieve Health for All

#### First Official United Nations Awareness Day on Universal Health Coverage Celebrated with Multi-Stakeholder Group, UN Headquarters, New York, USA

**12 DECEMBER 2018** – Leaders and advocates around the world are calling for greater access to quality, affordable health care for everyone on the first official [International Universal Health Coverage Day](#). While universal health coverage (UHC) has been celebrated in the past, this year is the first to be recognised as an official United Nations awareness day. This year’s UHC Day, themed “*Unite for Universal Health Coverage: Now is the Time for Collective Action*” emphasises the critical importance of strong health systems to reduce poverty, promote economic growth and achieve the 2030 Sustainable Development Goals.

“Strong leadership and community engagement are essential in ensuring that all people get the healthcare they need. On this International Day, let us reaffirm our commitment to a world with health for all.” said António Guterres, Secretary-General of the United Nations.

On last year’s UHC Day, the United Nations [officially proclaimed](#) 12 December International Universal Health Coverage Day, signifying unprecedented momentum and global commitment to achieving Health for All by 2030. With the official designation, which was brought forth by the Government of Thailand, this year’s UHC Day will be the farthest-reaching since it was first organised in 2014 by the Universal Health Coverage Coalition.

UHC Day is also an important milestone ahead of the [High-Level Meeting on Universal Health Coverage](#), which will take place in September 2019. The High-Level Meeting will convene world leaders to pledge actionable steps to make Health for All a reality by 2030.

During the evening of 12 December, WHO office at the UN, together with the Group of Friends of UHC, is hosting a flagship event on UHC. The event’s panel discussion will explore multi-stakeholder perspectives on the UHC agenda and the upcoming High-Level Meeting, with contributions from Permanent Representatives, UHC2030 and civil societies.

“The Group of Friends of UHC we have jointly created here in New York will build momentum towards the High –Level Meeting on UHC in 2019 and towards achieving UHC by 2030,” said Ambassador Koro Bessho, Permanent Representative of Japan to the United Nations. “It will facilitate Member States to renew commitment to ensure Health for All.”

“Over the past 30 years, World AIDS Day has galvanised global stakeholders, leaders and advocates to drive collective action toward alleviating the global burden of HIV,” said Ilona Kickbusch, Co-Chair of the UHC2030 Steering Committee. “Our goal is that UHC Day similarly become a household name and serve as an anchor point for the international community to drive progress toward health for all.”



## UHC Movement is Growing and Expanding Access to Essential Health Services

According to the [Global UHC Monitoring Report](#), at least half the world's population still lacks access to essential health services and catastrophic health expenses push almost 100 million people into extreme poverty every year. However, as the movement has grown, countries are increasingly taking action in expanding access to essential health services.

Thailand, a key convener of the first UHC Day in 2012, has extended basic health coverage to 99.9% of its population by bolstering and expanding its primary healthcare system and providing comprehensive health benefits that require no copayment. As a result, the country has improved its health outcomes and reduced household spending on health.

Similarly, Ghana invests in three key elements of UHC: financial protection, quality of services and access to services. Ghana has operated a national health insurance scheme for over 12 years and as a result, one third of the population is covered. Ghana also has a national quality strategy, which provides a coordinated approach to ensuring quality in all aspects of healthcare. Community based health and planning services, which serves as the pinnacle of primary health care, is a critical element of this effort.

## The Road Ahead: Accelerating Progress and Leaving No One Behind

This year's UHC Day builds on the momentum of recent milestones such as World Health Day 2018 and the second Global Conference on Primary Health Care in Astana, Kazakhstan. Stakeholders hope to make the first multi-stakeholder-led, UN Official Day the most impactful yet by committing to five central pillars of achieving UHC:

- Ensuring political commitment and multi-stakeholder action
- Leaving no one behind by reaching every person and community with comprehensive, quality health services
- Engaging community voices to ensure that all are represented
- Investing more and smarter by mobilizing resources equitably and efficiently
- Holding leaders accountable by improving monitoring and feedback mechanisms

UHC2030 convenes and houses [a multi-stakeholder Coordination Group on International UHC Day](#) that includes Member States, United Nations Systems, civil society, non-governmental organisations, the private sector and academia. The group developed the identity and campaign materials for UHC Day, building on the previous efforts of UHC Day.

In 2018, [UHC2030 funded over 60 UHC Day campaigns in 35+ countries](#). The events are led by multi-stakeholder groups, such as civil society, community organizations, youth groups, academia, health experts, parliamentarians and journalists. [More events are independently taking place all over the world](#), including events in Geneva, Nairobi, Tokyo and Berlin.

### Media Contact (please email requests for information or interviews)

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**UHC Day 2018 Quote Cards** [universalhealthcoverageday.org/toolkit/#messages](http://universalhealthcoverageday.org/toolkit/#messages)

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**António Guterres**  
Secretary-General of the United Nations

“ The road to UHC is long and arduous. But it is vital that we stay the course in all corners of the globe, and put pressure on our leaders when they appear to falter or mull a change in direction. ”



**Ban Ki-moon**  
Deputy Chair of The Elders,  
Former UN Secretary-General

“ The only way that we will actually bring health care to every person, everywhere in the world, is if we fundamentally change the system so that governments and people demand more investments in health. ”



**Jim Yong Kim**  
President, World Bank Group

“ UHC is a simple idea: that everyone should be able to access the health services they need, without suffering financial hardship. Although we have a lot of work to do, there are many countries in which that dream is becoming a reality. ”



**Dr. Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus**  
Director-General, World Health Organization

“ Great political leaders recognise the importance of Universal Health Coverage, not only in improving the health of their people, but also in stimulating economic growth and reducing inequalities in society. ”




**Gro Harlem Brundtland**  
Former Director-General, World Health Organization  
Former Prime Minister of Norway  
Member, The Elders

“ Leaders globally need to place health as a priority, and confront the powerful vested interests of private medicine and the pharmaceutical industry to ensure access is affordable for all. ”



**Graça Machel**  
Co-Founder and Deputy Chair of The Elders

“ The Group of Friends of UHC we have jointly created here in NY will build momentum towards the HLM on UHC in 2019 and towards achieving UHC by 2030, facilitating Member States to renew commitment to ensure health for all. ”



**Ambassador Koro Bessho**  
Permanent Representative of Japan to the United Nations, Permanent Mission of Japan to the United Nations

“ Health is the most fundamental human right on which all other rights can be enjoyed. Universal Health Coverage is its guarantee. ”



**Dr. Githinji Gitahi**  
Global CEO, Amref Health Africa  
Co-chair, UHC2030 Steering Committee

“ We must invest in research and share knowledge to strengthen health systems that can achieve health for all. ”



**Asha George**  
Chair, Health Systems Global

“ We have differences in caste, class, sex, gender, race, religion. But the color of blood is the same, so leave no one behind! UHC for ALL! ”



**Santosh Kumar Giri**  
Secretary and Executive Director, Kolkata Rista - India  
Advisory Group Member, Civil Society Engagement Mechanism for UHC2030