



## Universal Health Coverage Factsheet

### What is universal health coverage?

Universal health coverage means all people can access quality health services without financial hardship.<sup>1</sup> It includes the full range of essential health services, spanning health promotion, prevention, and treatment. UHC is included in the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) as target 3.8, with two indicators: 3.8.1 for service coverage and 3.8.2 for financial protection.

### Why do we need universal health coverage?

Health is a right and a necessity – not a privilege or a luxury. When people have their health, they can lift themselves out of poverty, provide for the well-being of their families and thrive in their communities. They also are better protected when public health crises occur.<sup>2</sup>

### Who doesn't have health coverage?

According to the World Health Organization, half of people in the world do not receive the health services they need. WHO also estimates that 100 million people are pushed into extreme poverty each year because of out-of-pocket spending on health.<sup>2</sup>

### How did COVID-19 affect access to health care?

COVID-19 made the need for universal health coverage [\[HD1\]](#) [\[HD2\]](#) more urgent. People whose health is already vulnerable have been affected most by the pandemic. Global health security means minimizing the danger and impact of acute public health events that endanger people's health, especially those that cross geographical regions and international boundaries. The pandemic illustrated a need for health security and health systems strengthening globally.

When COVID-19 vaccines became available, they were not distributed equitably. In addition, the pandemic led to severe health service disruptions across all major health areas – including sexual, reproductive, maternal, newborn, child and adolescent health; immunization; nutrition; cancer care; mental, neurological and substance use care; HIV, hepatitis, TB, malaria and neglected tropical diseases; and care for older people.<sup>3</sup>

### Is universal health coverage achievable?



To achieve universal health coverage, we need to strengthen health systems through a primary health care (PHC) approach. Primary health care is a people-centered, integrated approach to delivering health care. Strengthening health systems in this way is the most efficient and sustainable way to reach our universal health coverage and health security goals.

As The Economist has reported, “The evidence for the feasibility of universal health care goes beyond theories. It is supported by several pioneering examples.”<sup>4</sup>

Over the past decade, the World Bank has studied and shared lessons from UHC initiatives in diverse countries representing a third of the global population. There are many policy options for achieving universal health coverage, no one specific path.<sup>5</sup>

### **What can accelerate progress toward universal health coverage?**

From Dr. Tedros, WHO Director-General, June 2022:

“Universal health coverage is a political choice. At the United Nations General Assembly in September 2019, just a few months before the pandemic struck, all countries made that choice by endorsing the Political Declaration on Universal Health Coverage. The pandemic has only illustrated why that commitment is so important, and why, as the world responds to and recovers from the pandemic, we must all pursue it with more determination, innovation and collaboration.”<sup>6</sup>

The upcoming [2023 High-Level Meeting on UHC](#) provides countries and all stakeholders an opportunity to reinvigorate progress towards UHC, with action-oriented outcomes.

### **Where is my country on the journey to universal health coverage?**

UHC2030 operates a data portal for obtaining an overview of the state of UHC commitments in every country, and for accessing data on UHC and health systems.<sup>7</sup>



<sup>1</sup> <https://universalhealthcoverageday.org>

<sup>2</sup> <https://www.who.int/health-topics/universal-health-coverage>

<sup>3</sup> <https://www.who.int/news/item/07-02-2022-essential-health-services-face-continued-disruption-during-covid-19-pandemic>

<sup>4</sup> <https://www.economist.com/leaders/2018/04/26/universal-health-care-worldwide-is-within-reach>

<sup>5</sup> <https://www.worldbank.org/en/topic/health/publication/universal-health-coverage-study-series>

<sup>6</sup> <https://www.who.int/publications/i/item/9789240040618>

<sup>7</sup> <https://www.uhc2030.org/what-we-do/sharing-knowledge-and-networks/uhc-data-portal/>