



From commitment to action

Action agenda on universal health coverage
from the UHC movement

2023 UN High-Level Meeting on
Universal Health Coverage





In 2023, world leaders have a unique opportunity to reinvigorate progress towards delivering health for all.

Universal health coverage (UHC) means that all people have access to the quality health services they need, when and where they need them, including during emergencies, without risk of financial hardship. The means to achieve universal health coverage and health security is strengthening health systems. The most inclusive, equitable and cost-effective approach is primary health care.

Even before the COVID-19 pandemic, progress on universal health coverage was not on track, and we are now even further away from reaching our goals. The COVID-19 pandemic highlighted the need to build universal health coverage for times of crisis and calm, making clear that universal health coverage and global health security are two intertwined goals.

Urgent action is needed now to make universal health coverage a reality for everyone, everywhere. The Action Agenda from the UHC Movement is a set of action-oriented policy recommendations that country leaders should implement to advance universal health coverage and health security, and deliver health for all by 2030.

ACTION AGENDA



Action area 1: Champion political leadership for universal health coverage

Political leaders have now experienced how important universal health coverage is to their societies and economies, given their experiences during the pandemic and the ongoing impact of conflicts and the climate crisis.



Action area 2: Leave no one behind

Health is enshrined as a fundamental right of every human being, and it is the duty of governments to protect, promote and fulfil the right to health. Countries will benefit economically and socially by investing in health because universal health coverage makes a significant contribution to reducing poverty and promoting equity and social cohesion.



Action area 3: Adopt enabling laws and regulations

Policies, laws and regulations that integrate universal health coverage and health security and create an enabling environment for use of health technologies and innovations will strengthen future economic and social resilience.



Action area 4: Strengthen the health and care workforce to deliver quality health care

The health and care workforce is essential for ensuring healthy people, societies and economies and plays a crucial role during pandemics, conflicts, natural disasters and other emergencies. In all situations, women play a prominent role, delivering most front-line essential health and care services.



Action area 5: Invest more, invest better

Universal health coverage is an important foundation for healthy people, societies and economies and makes countries more resilient in health emergencies. Consistent levels of public spending on health are central to progress towards universal health coverage. Primary health care is a critical investment for both universal health coverage and health security.



Action area 6: Move together towards universal health coverage

Governments cannot make progress towards universal health coverage without stakeholders that play a critical role in developing, reviewing and implementing national health policy frameworks.



Action area 7: Guarantee gender equality in health

Gender equality, including equal rights and equal access to services, are critical to achieving universal health coverage and leaving no one behind. Gender equality in the health workforce is a necessary component for achieving universal health coverage.



Action area 8: Connect universal health coverage and health security

Universal health coverage and global health security are intertwined goals anchored in health systems in every country. Leaders must act now to design and resource integrated approaches to support both universal health coverage and prevention, preparedness and response capacities for health emergencies within wider efforts to build equitable, resilient health systems.



PRIORITY ACTIONS AND MILESTONES



Action area 1: Champion political leadership for universal health coverage

- Provide strategic leadership at the highest political level to champion universal health coverage as a national political priority through a whole-of-government approach.
- Strengthen and finance a comprehensive essential health benefits package based on epidemiological needs and disease burden, prioritizing primary health care as a foundation of health systems for both universal health coverage and health security.
- Encourage and support subnational governments, communities, civil society and private sector leadership and mobilization for universal health coverage.

2025 Milestones

- National and subnational health policy frameworks include specific and measurable goals and targets to increase universal health coverage by expanding primary health care and a comprehensive essential health benefits package, improving financial protection, and extending population coverage, consistent with the achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals.
- Government budgets make the necessary financial provisions to achieve these goals and targets.



Action area 2: Leave no one behind

- Ensure that all national health policy frameworks address the health needs of vulnerable and disadvantaged groups throughout their life course.
- Remove the barriers of various types of discrimination from all national and local health policy frameworks.
- Collect the best available knowledge and information to design the policy, and measure progress in universal health coverage in order to leave no one behind.

2025 Milestones

- National health policy frameworks prioritize vulnerable and disadvantaged groups across their life course by strengthening universal access to quality health services and products.
- Policies are designed, domestic resources are mobilized, and budgets are allocated, with a focus on anti-discrimination, accessibility, and progressive universalism, and countries monitor and evaluate progress using agreed SDG indicators, including routine analysis disaggregated by stratifiers including gender, age, race, class, geography, sexuality and (dis)ability.



Action area 3: Adopt enabling laws and regulations

- Create enabling legislative frameworks that strengthen health systems.
- Implement policies, laws and regulations for a comprehensive essential health benefits package, financial protection, primary health care and integrated services to support universal health coverage and health security.
- Adopt policies, laws and regulations that strengthen ecosystems for health-care technology and innovation to accelerate progress towards universal health coverage.

2025 Milestones

- Laws and regulations have been enacted and resourced to accelerate the implementation of universal health coverage reforms in line with the SDG targets and to enable the safe and affordable use of health technology and innovation.
- Measurable national targets for implementation of the essential health benefits package, financial protection, primary health care and integrated services that support universal health coverage and health security are set in laws and regulations.
- Progress is monitored and evaluated.



Action area 4: Strengthen the health and care workforce to deliver quality health care

- Implement existing international agreements to recognize and resource the health and care workforce as the foundation of resilient health systems.
- Apply robust planning and financing to retain, expand, and protect the health and care workforce.
- Invest in innovative care delivery models to improve the quality of health and care and foster trust.

2025 Milestones

- Consistent with achievement of target 3.c of the SDGs, ensure that national health policy frameworks include plans for workforce action and investment to increase financing, recruitment, development, compensation, training and retention of health workers.
- Address workforce shortfalls.
- Create financial plans to properly compensate the health and care workforce, achieve gender equity in leadership and eliminate gender pay gaps to establish fair pay.
- Monitor investments in health workforce training in countries that benefit from migration of health workforce.
- Monitor and evaluate progress, including innovative care delivery models, to improve the quality of health care and trust.



PRIORITY ACTIONS AND MILESTONES



Action area 5: Invest more, invest better

- Increase and stabilize levels of public spending on health to make health systems more resilient and equitable.
- Increase financing for primary health care to strengthen health systems and scale up services.
- Invest more to strengthen financial protection.

2025 Milestones

- Countries have improved financial protection to ensure that everyone can access the health services they need and monitor financial protection in line with the SDG 3 targets for universal health coverage.
- Countries have increased spending on primary health care.
- Low-and middle-income countries have increased and stabilized their levels of health spending, and have adopted nationally appropriate spending targets, ideally at least at 5% of GDP or more.¹
- More official development assistance is aligned to national health and financing priorities for universal health.



Action area 6: Move together towards universal health coverage

- Champion participatory, inclusive governance and coordinate a meaningful whole-of-society approach for universal health coverage and health security.
- Institutionalize mechanisms for inclusive health governance and adopt policy frameworks that enable and resource social participation.
- Promote trust and transparency by strengthening accountability in health governance.

2025 Milestones

- National health policy frameworks establish inclusive, participatory mechanisms for meaningful engagement of all stakeholders, including communities, civil society, patients, young people, the private sector, and international partners when relevant, and an independent accountability body has been established.
- Adequate national resources have been allocated to inclusive health governance, and international resources have been aligned to national governance priorities.



Action area 7: Guarantee gender equality in health

- Eliminate gender inequality and discrimination in the design and delivery of health policy and services.
- Guarantee gender equality in health systems and decision-making at all levels, close the gender pay gap, and value and appropriately remunerate unpaid and underpaid health and care workers, including community health workers.
- Collect the best available knowledge and information on gender priorities and challenges to improve policy and programme design.

2025 Milestones

- Gender-responsive policies and health services, including universal access to sexual and reproductive health services, are designed and mainstreamed in national health policy frameworks, with time-bound targets and accountability mechanisms set for 2030, including targets for leadership equity, equal pay and healthy, safe, decent working conditions.
- Countries monitor and evaluate progress towards universal health coverage in analyses disaggregated by gender and other stratifiers.



Action area 8: Connect universal health coverage and health security

- Transform health systems and foster resilience through integrated approaches that connect universal health coverage to health security in order to ensure capacity to prepare for, prevent, detect and respond to disease outbreaks and other health emergencies.
- Build community trust in science, vaccines and public health institutions.
- Protect people against interruptions in essential health services during emergencies.

2025 Milestones

- National health policy frameworks have defined plans to guarantee universal health coverage that is maintained during emergencies, including through linkage with communities.
- Integrated approaches are prioritized for investment to support both universal health coverage and prevention, preparedness and response capacities for health emergencies, with clear, measurable indicators for implementation.
- Countries routinely monitor the level of trust in health systems and have reduced health misinformation.

¹ Cognizant of current global economic challenges, WHO, WB and OECD will suggest to Member States in the lead up to the UHC High-Level Meeting to set nationally appropriate, and sustainable, spending targets for quality investments in health systems, consistent with national sustainable development strategies, and transition towards sustainable financing through domestic public resource mobilization.