

UNIVERSAL HEALTH COVERAGE

Oral Health for All

What is Universal Health Coverage?

Universal Health Coverage (UHC) means that every person, everywhere has access to the health services they need without the risk of financial hardship when paying for them. UHC encompasses the full spectrum of essential, quality health services, from health promotion to prevention, treatment, rehabilitation and palliative care.¹

UHC is not something that can be achieved overnight, and all countries will approach the challenge in different ways: there is no one size fits all. But countries at all income levels can take steps to move closer to achieving UHC and develop their own UHC package that fits the needs of their population. Engagement with civil society, to establish their needs and assure their involvement, will be essential if oral health is to be incorporated successfully into UHC packages. This will require committed advocacy on the part of oral health professionals.²

DID YOU KNOW:

- At least half of the world's population still do not have full coverage of essential health services.¹
- About 100 million people are still being pushed into extreme poverty because they must pay for healthcare.¹
- Over 800 million people spend at least 10% of their household budgets to pay for healthcare.¹

What UHC does not mean

UHC is NOT:

- **free coverage for all possible health interventions**, regardless of the cost, as no country can provide all services free of charge on a sustainable basis;
- **just about health financing**. It encompasses all components of the health system: health service delivery systems, the health workforce, health facilities and communications networks, health technologies, information systems, quality assurance mechanisms, and governance and legislation;
- **only about ensuring a minimum package of health services**, but also about ensuring a progressive expansion of coverage of health services and financial protection as more resources become available.
- **solely about individual treatment services**, but also includes population-based services, including public health campaigns such as World Oral Health Day, and adding fluoride to water, and so on.

Why oral health must be part of UHC

Oral health is essential to general health and well-being at every stage of life. However, essential oral health services remain out of reach for millions of people. The integration of essential oral health services into UHC will help improve health outcomes and reduce inequalities in access to care.

DID YOU KNOW:

- More than half of the world's population (3.5 billion) suffer from untreated oral diseases, which can result in pain, infection, tooth loss and loss of productivity.³
- In 2010 direct treatment costs due to oral diseases worldwide were estimated at US\$298 billion yearly, corresponding to an average of 4.6% of global health expenditure.⁴

Leveraging the UN High-Level Meeting on UHC

The first-ever United Nations High-Level Meeting on UHC (UN HLM on UHC) will take place on 23 September 2019 in New York to secure political commitment from countries on UHC. The meeting will result in a Political Declaration, negotiated by UN Member States, that will form the basis for global efforts to provide universal access to affordable and quality health-care services.

DID YOU KNOW:

- All UN Member States have agreed to try to achieve UHC by 2030, as part of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). SDG 3 - the health goal - includes a target to “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.”⁵

Key asks for oral health

The Political Declaration for the HLM on UHC must address the following priorities in order to improve oral health and UHC:

1) Integrate oral health into primary healthcare and UHC

- Add essential oral health services to national essential packages of health services.
- Commit to provide at a minimum the World Health Organization (WHO) Basic Package of Oral Care, which includes access to emergency care and pain relief, affordable fluoride toothpaste and tooth decay management.
- Ensure access to adequately trained oral health professionals and strengthen oral health systems based on a people-centered healthcare approach as a part of primary healthcare.

2) Strengthen health surveillance systems to monitor oral health

- Commit to improve data collection and surveillance systems for noncommunicable diseases (NCDs) that integrate oral health indicators.
- Commit to produce data for SDG 3.8.1 (Coverage of essential health services) and go beyond the list of tracer topics to include oral health.

3) Increase investment in NCDs, oral health and UHC

- Recognize that investment in NCDs including oral health is critical to achieving UHC.
- Encourage the implementation of taxation on unhealthy products — such as tobacco, alcohol, and sugar-sweetened beverages — to assist in financing UHC. These interventions are cost-effective fiscal policies recommended in the WHO Best Buys.

References

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3. Global, regional, and national incidence, prevalence, and years lived with disability for 328 diseases and injuries for 195 countries, 1990–2016: a systematic analysis for the Global Burden of Disease Study 2016. GBD 2016 Disease and Injury Incidence and Prevalence Collaborators. *Lancet*. 2017; 390(10100): 1211-59.
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