

## Achieving Universal Health Coverage Subcommittee Topic Briefing

### Topic Overview

The United Nations (UN) and World Health Organization (WHO) have made the goal of achieving **universal health coverage (UHC)** critical to reaching the overall goal of Ensuring Healthy Lives and Promoting Well-Being for All. UHC is defined as “when all people have access to the health services they need, when, and where they need them, without financial hardship.” Adequate access to affordable health coverage is an issue that occurs in both developed and developing countries, and often is a result of social and economic inequalities within those countries. A lack of access to health coverage causes people across the world to live without necessary medical attention and services. Today, around half of the world’s population does not have adequate health coverage, and in turn does not receive important health services. Furthermore, 800 million people worldwide spend at least 10% of their household budget on healthcare and approximately 100 million people each year become **impoverished** because of the cost of health care.<sup>1</sup> Due to these alarming statistics, the United Nations and the World Health Organization have made achieving universal health coverage an important part of their work and part of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).

### Target 3.8 - Universal Health Coverage

SDG Target 3.8 aims to “achieve universal health coverage, 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.”<sup>2</sup> One of the most effective ways to improve access to quality and affordable health services is through promoting the strengthening of individual country’s health systems. Strengthening a health system may vary between countries, but often includes building hospitals and clinics, training doctors and nurses, and expanding access to healthcare especially in rural areas. By strengthening each country’s individual health system, more people can receive health coverage and maintain healthy lives. Although this represents a large and expensive goal, it is an extremely important one. The United Nations and its member states, along with its partners and other key actors, are taking many steps to make this goal a reality.

The WHO’s Universal Health Coverage 2030 (UHC2030) is a program with the goal of achieving universal health coverage by 2030. In order to achieve this goal, the program includes initiatives such as **lobbying** governments at both the local and global levels to focus on improving health systems, helping organizations and the media hold governments accountable for the funding and effective implementation of health coverage plans, and encouraging private companies to invest and aid in the development of health coverage systems around the world.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Universal Health Coverage - World Health Organization

[https://www.who.int/health-topics/universal-health-coverage/#tab=tab\\_1](https://www.who.int/health-topics/universal-health-coverage/#tab=tab_1)

<sup>2</sup> Sustainable Development Goals - World Health Organization <https://www.who.int/sdg/targets/en/>

<sup>3</sup>What We Do - UHC 2030 <https://www.uhc2030.org/what-we-do/>



# WORLD AFFAIRS COUNCIL

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In September 2019, the UN held a high-level meeting on universal health coverage. The attendees of the meeting included heads of states, policymakers, global leaders in the health field, and health coverage activists. The goal of this conference was to gain financial and political commitments from countries to help achieve this goal and to come up with steps to accelerate the process of hiring and training a skilled workforce, as well as to ensure that the newly-hired health workforce is equipped with the materials and medications they need to treat the number patients they will see daily.<sup>4</sup>

The task of achieving universal health coverage is not an easy one. It is estimated that around 18 million additional health workers would be needed, primarily in developing countries, by 2030 to ensure healthy lives and promote well-being for all.<sup>5</sup> Regions of the world with the highest burden caused by disease also have the lowest proportion of health workers that are needed to deliver critical medical services. Although achieving universal health coverage is difficult and requires a great deal of funding, the benefits include healthier societies that can lead to more productive economies, with more people being healthy enough to have jobs and contribute to the workforce. This can help eliminate poverty which often causes people to not be able to afford adequate healthcare. Achieving universal health coverage is also a goal that can positively impact both developed and developing countries, therefore giving leaders from all countries the motivation to work together in reaching this goal.



<sup>4</sup>UN High Level Meeting on Universal Health Coverage - World Health Organization <https://www.who.int/news-room/events/detail/2019/09/23/default-calendar/un-high-level-meeting-on-universal-health-coverage>

<sup>5</sup> SDG 3 - UN Stats <https://unstats.un.org/sdgs/report/2019/goal-03/>

### Quick Facts

*Find at least three quick facts on universal health coverage from this briefing paper. Quick facts should be about one sentence long and provide useful information on the subcommittee topic. A good example of a quick fact is a statistic related to the topic.*

1. Quick Fact:
2. Quick Fact:
3. Quick Fact:

### Questions to Consider

*Use the information provided in the briefing paper above, as well as your own research on your assigned country, to answer the questions below.*

1. Why is achieving universal health coverage included in the United Nations' goal of Ensuring Healthy Lives and Promoting Well-Being for All?
2. How can countries ensure that *all* their people, including the most poor and vulnerable, have access to the health services they need?
3. Universal health coverage is an ambitious goal, and what makes up a health system is very complex. How can countries work together to achieve universal health coverage?
4. What type of healthcare system does your assigned country have? Does your assigned country have universal healthcare?

### Glossary

Term	Description
<b>Impoverished</b>	Reduced to poverty.
<b>Lobbying</b>	An attempt to influence government action. Lobbyists often argue for a few select programs or regulations to achieve a certain goal.
<b>Universal health coverage (UHC)</b>	When all people have access to the health services they need, when and where they need them, without financial hardship.