

THE HIGH-LEVEL MEETING ON UNIVERSAL HEALTH COVERAGE: ITS PURPOSE, NEXT STEPS AND WAYS TO ENGAGE



Living Goods photo

A community health worker, using mobile technology, provides primary health services to a family.

An Historic Opportunity for Nations and Communities

As part of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, all countries have committed to try to achieve Universal Health Coverage (UHC) by 2030. UHC includes access to quality essential health care services; access to safe, effective, quality and affordable essential medicines and vaccines for all; as well as protection against health-related financial hardship.

The UN High-Level Meeting (HLM) on UHC, held on September 23, 2019, during the United Nations General Assembly, was the most significant political meeting held on UHC to date. It was an opportunity to mobilize the global community and secure political commitments from Heads of State and Government to accelerate progress toward achieving UHC by 2030.

Some UN Member State delegations talked about their plans for national implementation. Of the countries that spoke, 31 across six continents included and referred to community health and/or primary health care in their remarks, recognizing its importance to UHC.

“As one of the basic steps to ensure UHC in practical terms, Ethiopia has developed a comprehensive five-year health sector transformation plan that includes training and retraining of a sufficient amount of health workers,” said Ethiopian President Sahle-Work Zewde. “Through the Ministry of Health, Ethiopia has developed a national health financing system and is currently implementing community-based health insurance to fund service delivery.”

UN member states have been urged to prioritize community health as critical to achieving UHC by integrating such programming into national health systems. The programs must be rooted in quality and financially sustainable.

Primary health care, which provides for quality, people-centered services and focuses on prevention and promotion, is the foundation for UHC.

Next Steps 



A community health worker provides maternal and child health care.

During the UN General Assembly, participants adopted the [Political Declaration for UHC](#), a landmark for all working in global health. It calls for the scale-up of competent, skilled and motivated health workers, including community health workers. UHC advocates say while adoption of the declaration is an achievement, they urge collaboration across sectors and with partners in its implementation to make UHC a reality.

Next steps that have been discussed include:

Prioritizing community voices: The global health community can amplify and elevate authentic community voices to ensure they are truly heard. For UHC to be successful, communities must actively define what services they need and how they want them delivered. As countries move forward in making the Political Declaration actionable, communities need to be included in setting priorities and policies.

Utilizing budget tracking to hold decision-makers accountable: As governments move forward in implementing the Political Declaration, civil society organizations have an important role to play in holding decision-makers accountable in delivering on their promises. One way to do this is to track budget line items to ensure funds are being committed and released to expand access to health services.

Collaborating and advocating across sectors:

Delivering health for all isn't just a decision made and implemented by ministries of health. Ministries of finance are equally important and need to be engaged. Budgeting is competitive and advocates need to demonstrate the value of investments in the health sector. As post-HLM meetings are hosted, both ministries of health and finance need to be in the room with civil society organizations and advocates.

Ways to Engage

Advocacy at national and local levels can help shape the UHC agenda. Particular elements to advocate for include:

- **Prioritizing primary health care**, including community health, as a key channel for delivering cost-effective, high-impact health care to the poorest, most vulnerable populations
- **Investing in enabling community health workers** to do their jobs by providing them with adequate training, supervision, motivation/compensation and equipment
- **Focusing on leveraging integrated health platforms**, such as integrated community case management, which can deliver results across multiple health areas, generating efficiencies that drive costs down
- **Identifying and supporting interventions**, including task shifting, that drive high impact
- **Staying outcome-focused** and driving accountability by paying community health workforces and implementing partners based on performance
- **Recognizing the value of technology** in managing, monitoring and improving health programs, including supply chain management, as well as improving the quality and range of services to those at the last mile
- **Connecting with networks** such as [HENNET](#) and [Communities at the Heart of UHC](#) to get the latest information on what's happening globally, nationally and locally

For more information, see:
<https://www.uhc4communities.com/>
<https://hennet.or.ke/>