

SENIOR POLICY SEMINAR



The Universal Health Coverage Agenda in the Caribbean: Challenges and Options

October 22 – 23, 2012

St. Philip, Barbados

ACTIVITY BRIEF

BACKGROUND

In May 2005, the World Health Assembly (WHA) endorsed Resolution WHA58.331 urging Member States to work towards universal coverage and to ensure that their populations have access to needed health interventions without the risk of financial catastrophe. This goal was defined as “universal health coverage” (UHC)

The World Health Report (WHR) 2010 highlighted that financing for UHC requires that Financing systems need to be specifically designed to:

- Provide all people with access to needed health services (including prevention, promotion, treatment and rehabilitation) of sufficient quality to be effective;
- Ensure that the use of these services does not expose the user to financial hardship

The WHR 2010 based on new research and lessons learnt from experience outlined how countries can modify their financing systems to move more quickly towards universal health coverage and to sustain those achievements. (World Health Organization, 2010)

Main barriers countries face to achieve UHC identified are: i) availability of resources; ii) reliance on direct payments to finance services which may conduct the less well-off to impoverishment and financial hardship; ii) the inefficient and inequitable use of resources. But, “every country regardless of their level of development can do something to improve their position toward UHC in at least one of those three key areas.”

The Caribbean region faces important challenges related to future health costs based on the population aging and an increasing prevalence of non-communicable diseases (NCDs) that make these efforts even harder challenging the governments’ ability to respond. NCDs are responsible for six of the top ten leading causes of death in the region, represent a growing portion of health spending, and impose a large economic burden at the societal, community, and household level. (The World Bank, 2011)

A document by the International Monetary Fund analyzing the options for universal health coverage for the Eastern Caribbean Currency Union (ECCU) countries concludes that the best financing option for UHC is country-specific—depending on a country’s economic, cultural, institutional, demographic and epidemiological characteristics, as well as political economy considerations. It proposes however that health system reforms towards UHC should largely be based on taxation, since high indebtedness levels prevent these countries to use external sources of funding.¹

The concept of UHC is not new to the Caribbean region. Several countries of the region have been emphasizing a need for universal coverage and health for all in their national health plans over last 20 years. With a reference to social protection, the CARICOM’s Caribbean Cooperation for Health (2010-2015) has an objective to develop “mechanisms to assess or develop health financing policies, strategies and programs to increase efficiencies and measure performance”, which is also recognized in the PAHO/WHO Caribbean Sub-regional Cooperation Strategy (2010-2015) among the most important priorities. The promotion of the Caribbean Single Market and Economy (CSME) as well strategies pursued by several governments in regard to medical tourism present both challenges and opportunities for this region and call for economies of scale in delivering cooperation for health.

Diverse events to promote UHC in the Americas and to disseminate the findings of the WHR 2010 have taken place since its publication.² Moving the discussion to the Caribbean Sub-Region is a priority now for the Pan American Health Organization (PAHO) considering the increasing interest by countries in the Sub-Region related to health systems financing reviews toward UHC.

OBJECTIVE

To promote policy dialogue on policy options and best practices in developing health financing systems that support moving towards UHC in the Caribbean and identify main challenges and way forward to guarantee its sustainability.

In particular:

- To promote health financing system reviews as an essential step in the process of shaping national health financing systems and strategies towards achieving

¹ Tsounta, E. (2009) Universal Health Care 101: Lessons for the Eastern Caribbean and Beyond. Working Paper WP/09/61. Washington DC. International Monetary Fund

² “Ministerial Forum on Universal Health Coverage” on April 2012. Available at:

http://www.mexicoforumuhc.org/index_en.php

“Seminario internacional de la financiación de los sistemas de salud. El camino hacia la cobertura universal” Buenos Aires, Argentina 2011. Available at: <http://www.isalud.edu.ar/actividades.php?ID=52>

UHC and social health protection under the challenges presented by population aging and the increasing burden of NCDs.

- To promote research on feasible measures for tracking progress on all UHC objectives: financial risk protection (catastrophic and impoverishing expenditure), access (reduce gap between need and utilization) and quality

The main expected outcome of this meeting should become a Caribbean UHC Action Plan, which will summarize the meeting findings as well as propose way forward for strengthening health systems and services to benefit the peoples of the Sub-region.

PROFILE OF PARTICIPANTS:

Policy makers in the health sector, government policy makers in charge of social policy, senior managers of national health insurance funds, and experts involved in health system reform in the Caribbean.

VENUE:

The Crane Residential Resort

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Transportation: The cost of a taxi from the airport to The Crane Residential Resort is estimated at US\$20.00 or BDS\$40.00 one way. You are advised to settle on the fare and currency [US\$1.00 = BDS\$2.00] before beginning your trip. A list of taxi fares to specific destinations is displayed in the Arrivals area.

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