Universal Health is a GREAT IDEA

and the key to addressing many of the Region’s most serious health challenges

Introduction

Universal Health is a health and universal health coverage imply that all people and communities have access, without discrimination on the basis of sex, race, religion, political belief, economic or social condition, to comprehensive, equitable, and quality health services determined at the national level according to needs, and with access to safe, effective, and affordable quality medicines, while ensuring that the use of such services does not expose to financial difficulties, especially groups in conditions of vulnerability. Universal health and universal health coverage require determining and implementing policies and actions with a multisectoral approach to address the social determinants of health and promote a societywide commitment to fostering health and well-being.

Universal access to health and universal health coverage are the foundation of a comprehensive health policy. Universal health and universal health coverage are necessary conditions for achieving health and well-being. Without universal access and equitable access, universal health coverage is an unattainable goal: both are necessary conditions for achieving health and well-being. Universal access to health and universal health coverage are necessary for improving health outcomes and other basic objectives of health systems, and they are based on the right of every person to the enjoyment of the highest attainable standard of health, equity, and solidarity, values adopted by the PAHO Member States.

The WHO Constitution states that “The enjoyment of the highest attainable standard of health is one of the fundamental rights of every human being without distinction as to race, religion, political belief, economic or social condition” and it is the core value of universal access to comprehensive health and universal health coverage. The right to health should be combined with and provided without discrimination of age, ethnicity, sex, gender, sexual orientation, class, geographic origin, wealth, among others, and with data disaggregated by sex and other discriminatory factors, taking into account the different needs of vulnerable groups and the role of women in health.

Efficient and participatory health systems require the commitment of society, with clear mechanisms for inclusion, transparency, accountability, and articulation of health needs. They should be multidisciplinary, aligned with, and coordinated with other policies, while ensuring that those responsible for making decisions, including policy-makers, and others for whom decisions are relevant, make health decisions and implement them.

The strategy presented here explains the conditions that will enable countries to focus and evaluate their policies and measure their progress toward universal access to health and universal health coverage. It includes a framework of four levels or results that can be used to establish the medium-term targets for access to health services at the national level, based on the needs of the population, and contribute to the fulfillment of all human rights.

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Strategic line 1
Expanding accessible and comprehensive primary health care services.

Strong health care systems ensure that health services are accessible to all, and that resources are allocated efficiently. They also ensure that health systems are sustainable and capable of adapting to new challenges, including global pandemics. In this regard, primary care models are widely recognized as the cornerstone of effective health systems. Furthermore, they are essential for ensuring universal access to health and promoting health and well-being. The role of primary care is to provide comprehensive, equitable, and integrated health services that are accessible to all, regardless of their economic or social condition. Primary care services should be designed with due regard to the specific needs of groups in conditions of vulnerability.

Strategic line 2
Strengthening health system governance.

Strengthening the ability of health authorities and communities to plan and execute health policies and programs is essential for ensuring that primary care services are available to all. This involves developing comprehensive, quality, universal health coverage policies and plans. These plans should include defined targets, which should be monitored and evaluated. They should also ensure that health services are aligned with the objectives of the health system, as appropriate, for social participation and dialogue. They should also ensure that health services are aligned with the objectives of the health system, as appropriate, for social participation and dialogue.

Strategic line 3
Increasing and improving financing, with equity and efficiency, and advancing toward the elimination of direct payment that constitutes a barrier to access at the point of service.

Increasing and improving financing is a necessary—though not sufficient—condition to achieve universal access to health. Recognizing the need to make health care affordable and accessible, countries have planned and achieved progressively. Advancing toward the elimination of direct payment as a financial mechanism should be a key goal of all health systems. Direct payment as a financial mechanism should be a key goal of all health systems. This will reduce inequities and increase financial protection, understood as the costs that individuals pay for health care, at the point of service, and at the community level, which will generate public health and universal health coverage.

Strategic line 4
Strengthening international collaboration to address social determinants of health.

Established as a strategic national coordination mechanism for social determinants, this mechanism aims to strengthen the technical and policy-making capacities of countries, improve public policies and programs, and mobilize support for achieving universal health coverage. It is essential to ensure that health systems are sustainable and capable of adapting to new challenges, including global pandemics. In this regard, primary care models are widely recognized as the cornerstone of effective health systems. Furthermore, they are essential for ensuring universal access to health and promoting health and well-being. The role of primary care is to provide comprehensive, equitable, and integrated health services that are accessible to all, regardless of their economic or social condition. Primary care services should be designed with due regard to the specific needs of groups in conditions of vulnerability. These plans should include defined targets, which should be monitored and evaluated. They should also ensure that health services are aligned with the objectives of the health system, as appropriate, for social participation and dialogue.

From the bottom line of the health care system, the attention should be directed toward the greatest inequities, and the health-related components of public social protection policies and social programs, including conditional cash transfers programs, as appropriate; share best health practices and experiences from programs implemented by civil society and social participation for universal access.

Health systems are a complex mix of providers, programs, and development processes, including those at other scales, that have an impact on health. These plans should include defined targets, which should be monitored and evaluated. They should also ensure that health services are aligned with the objectives of the health system, as appropriate, for social participation and dialogue.