On first-ever Universal Health Coverage Day, all countries urged to make **quality health coverage accessible to everyone**

,
everywhere

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NEW YORK, 12 December 2014 – A new global coalition of more than 500 leading health and development organizations worldwide is urging governments to accelerate reforms that ensure everyone, everywhere, can access quality health services without being forced into poverty. The coalition was launched today, on the first-ever Universal Health Coverage Day, to stress the importance of universal access to health services for saving lives, ending extreme poverty, building resilience against the health effects of climate change and ending deadly epidemics such as Ebola.

Universal Health Coverage Day marks the two-year anniversary of a United Nations resolution , unanimously passed on 12 December 2012, which endorsed universal health coverage as a pillar of sustainable development and global security. Despite progress in combatting global killers such as HIV/AIDS and vaccine-preventable diseases such as measles, tetanus and diphtheria, the global gap between those who can access needed health services without fear of financial hardship and those who cannot is widening. Each year, 100 million people fall into poverty because they or a family member becomes seriously ill and they have to pay for care out of their own pockets. Around one billion people worldwide can't even access the health care they need, paving the way for disease outbreaks to become catastrophic epidemics.

"The need for equitable access to quality health care has never been greater, and there is unprecedented demand for universal health coverage around the world," said Michael Myers, Managing Director of The Rockefeller Foundation, which is spearheading Universal Health Coverage Day. "Universal health coverage is an idea whose time has come – because health for all saves lives, strengthens nations and is achievable and affordable for every country."

For much of the 20th century, universal health coverage was limited to a few high-income countries, but in the past two decades, a number of lower- and middle-income countries have successfully embraced reforms to make quality health care universally available. Countries as diverse as Brazil, Ghana, Mexico, Rwanda, Turkey and Thailand have made tremendous progress toward universal health coverage in recent years. Today, the two most populous countries, India and China, are pursuing universal health coverage, and more than 80 countries have asked the World Health Organization for implementation assistance.

"Putting people's health needs ahead of their ability to pay stems poverty and stimulates growth," said Dr. Tim Evans, Senior Director for the Health, Nutrition and Population Global Practice at the World Bank Group. "Universal health coverage is an essential ingredient to end extreme poverty and boost shared prosperity within a generation."

The 500+ organizations participating in the first-ever Universal Health Coverage Day coalition

represent a diverse cross-section of global health and development issues, including infectious diseases, maternal and child health, non-communicable diseases and palliative care. Across these issues, knowledge and technologies exist to save and improve lives in significant numbers, but the impact of these tools is severely hampered by lack of equitable access to quality health services.

"Ebola is only the most recent example of why universal health coverage is the most powerful concept in public health," said Dr. Marie-Paule Kieny, Assistant Director-General for Health Systems and Innovation at the World Health Organization. "Investing in strong, equitable health systems is the only way to truly protect and improve lives, particularly in the face of emerging threats like the global rise of non-communicable diseases and increasingly severe natural disasters."

Events in 25 Countries Mark First-Ever Universal Health Coverage Day

Organizations around the world are calling on policymakers to prioritize universal health coverage, and are hosting events on 12 December to catalyze action, including:

- New York, USA: High-level event on Ebola and resilience, organized by the Permanent Missions of France, Japan, Germany and Senegal to the United Nations, in collaboration with The Rockefeller Foundation and the Columbia University Mailman School of Public Health.

- London, UK: Expert panel at the London School of Hygiene & Tropical Medicine on creating resilient, equitable health systems, organized in partnership with The Rockefeller Foundation and Action for Global Health.
- New Delhi, India: High-level event on universal health coverage implementation in both India and the global context, convened by the Public Health Foundation of India, Oxfam India and the World Health Organization Country Office for India.

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About The Rockefeller Foundation

For more than 100 years, The Rockefeller Foundation's mission has been to promote the well-being of humanity throughout the world. Today, The Rockefeller Foundation pursues this mission through dual goals: advancing inclusive economies that expand opportunities for more broadly shared prosperity, and building resilience by helping people, communities and institutions prepare for, withstand, and emerge stronger from acute shocks and chronic stresses. To achieve these goals, The Rockefeller Foundation works at the intersection of four focus areas—advance health, revalue ecosystems, secure livelihoods, and transform cities—to address the root causes of emerging challenges and create systemic change. Together with partners and grantees, The Rockefeller Foundation strives to catalyze and scale transformative innovations, create unlikely partnerships that span sectors, and take risks others cannot—or will not. For more information, please visit www.rockefellerfoundation.org .

About the World Bank Group

The World Bank Group plays a key role in the global effort to end extreme poverty and boost shared prosperity. Working in more than 100 countries, the World Bank Group provides financing, advice, and other solutions that enable countries to address the most urgent challenges of development. For more information on the Bank Group's work in health, nutrition, and population, please visit www.worldbank.org /health.

About the World Health Organization (WHO)

WHO is the directing and coordinating authority for health within the United Nations system. It is responsible for providing leadership on global health matters, shaping the health research agenda, setting norms and standards, articulating evidence-based policy options, improving global health security, providing technical support to countries and monitoring and assessing health trends. For more information, please visit http://www.who.int/whr/2010/en/ .

Additional Resources

- Universal Health Coverage Day: http://universalhealthcoverageday.org/
- World Bank: Health, Nutrition and Population: http://www.worldbank.org/en/topic/health

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Additional Partner Remarks

"Universal Health Coverage (UHC) and investments in health systems can accelerate global efforts to ensure access to healthcare to anyone who needs it, leaving no one behind. UHC can help us galvanize progress towards achieving all the health-related Millennium Development Goals and ending preventable deaths, particularly among the most vulnerable populations – women, children and adolescents – as well as communities beyond 2015. With universal coverage, we can foster greater equity, empower countless individuals, and contribute to a life of dignity for all."
-Ban Ki-moon, United Nations Secretary-General

"India's health reform movement coincides with this global crusade for UHC at a crucial time, when the country's population faces impoverishment due to rising healthcare costs, emerging and new disease outbreaks and a health system badly in need of integrated services, better access and more robust primary health care. UHC would provide an ideal framework to address many of these pressing issues in a comprehensive manner."
-Dr. Priya Balasubramaniam-Kakkar, Senior Public Health Scientist, Public Health Foundation of India

“If we invest in our health systems now—which we know yields an impressive return for the investment—we can build an Africa where individuals, families, and entire nations reach their full potential.”
-Dr. Agnes Binagwaho, Minister of Health of Rwanda

“Strong health systems that reach everyone, everywhere are crucial to fight HIV, TB and malaria.”
-Mark Dybul, Executive Director, The Global Fund to Fight AIDS, Tuberculosis and Malaria

"Health care is not a commodity or privilege, but a human right."
-Dr. Julio Frenk, Dean, Harvard T.H. Chan School of Public Health and former Minister of Health of Mexico

“Universal health coverage secures health and well-being for women and girls everywhere.”
-Nyaradzayi Gumbonzvanda, General Secretary, World YWCA

“To be effective, universal health coverage requires a holistic approach to women’s health – including universal access to their reproductive health and rights.”
-Katja Iversen, Chief Executive Officer, Women Deliver

“The right to sexual and reproductive health is central to health for all and vital to the future we want.”
-Dr. Babatunde Osotimehin, Executive Director, UNFPA

"With universal health coverage Ebola outbreaks would be contained faster and more effectively."
-Dr. Peter Piot, Director, London School of Hygiene and Tropical Medicine

“Universal health protection is key to fighting poverty, reducing inequity and nurturing economic growth. Sustainable development with decent jobs for all requires investment in health protection – these linkages cannot be ignored in policy development.”
-Guy Ryder, Director-General, International Labour Organization

“Save the Children is campaigning for every child to receive the essential health care they need to survive and fulfil their potential. Robust health systems not only prevent crises like the current Ebola outbreak, but are also the foundation of efforts to end preventable child and maternal deaths.”
-Jasmine Whitbread, CEO, Save the Children International