12 December 2016 (Geneva) -- To mark Universal Health Coverage Day, the World Health Organization today launched a new data portal to track progress towards universal health coverage (UHC) around the world. The portal shows where countries need to improve access to services, and where they need to improve information.

The portal features the latest data on access to health services globally and in each of WHO's 194 Member States, along with information about equity of access. Next year WHO will add data on the impact that paying for health services has on household finances.

"Any country seeking to achieve UHC must be able to measure it," said Dr Margaret Chan, Director-General of WHO. "Data on its own won't prevent disease or save lives, but it shows where governments need to act to strengthen their health systems and protect people from the potentially devastating effects of health care costs."

UHC means that all people and communities can access the health services they need without facing financial hardship. So countries aiming to provide UHC need to build health systems that deliver the quality services and products people need, when and where they need them, through an adequately resourced and well-trained health workforce.

The ability to provide strong primary health care services at community level is essential to make progress towards universal health coverage.
Last year, the world's governments set themselves a target to achieve UHC by 2030 as part of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). UHC is not only essential to achieving the health-related targets, it will also contribute to other goals such as no poverty (Goal 1), and decent work and economic growth (Goal 8).

In November, the United Nations working group responsible for deciding how to monitor progress towards the SDGs agreed on two measures for UHC: the proportion of a population with access to 16 essential health services; and the proportion of a population that spends more than 25% of household income on health. WHO's new UHC Data Portal offers data on both indicators in a single place, offering an initial snapshot of the status of UHC globally and by country.

The portal shows that:

- Less than half of children with suspected pneumonia in low income countries are taken to an appropriate health provider.
- Of the estimated 10.4 million new cases of tuberculosis in 2015, 6.1 million were detected and officially notified in 2015, leaving a gap of 4.3 million.

- High blood pressure affects 1.13 billion people. Over half of the world's adults with high blood pressure in 2015 lived in Asia. Around 24% of men and 21% of women had uncontrolled blood pressure in 2015.
- About 44% of WHO's member states report having less than 1 physicianÂÂ per 1000 population. The African Region suffers almost 25% of the global burden of disease but has only 3% of the world's health workers.

"Expanding access to services will involve increasing spending for most countries," said Dr Marie-Paule Kieny, WHO's Assistant Director-General for Health Systems and Innovation. "But as important as *what* is spent is *how* it's spent. All countries can make progress towards UHC, even at low spending levels."

Some countries have made good progress towards UHC with low spending, while others achieve lower levels of coverage even though they spend more. And among countries with similarly low levels of spending, there are large variations in coverage levels.