



Dr. Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus
Director-General
World Health Organization
Geneva, Switzerland

Mr. Martin Chungong
Secretary General
Inter-Parliamentary Union (IPU)
Geneva, Switzerland

25 March 2024

Dear Dr. Tedros and Mr. Chungong,

Subject: It is time for action - Invest in Universal Health Coverage now

As members of the WHO Youth Council, our organizations are committed to ensuring access to quality essential health services for everyone, including the 1.2 billion young people under the age of 25. In celebrating Universal Health Coverage (UHC) Day, we are writing to urge you to mobilize parliaments and reinvigorate their support to legislate for and invest in Health for All in line with the commitment made by adopting the IPU resolution on Universal Health Coverage in October 2019.

The global situation is dire: according to the 2023 UHC Global Monitoring Report, 4.5 billion individuals – more than half of the world’s population – lack access to essential health services, and 2 billion people face financial hardship in reaching those services. These aren’t just numbers; they represent the daily struggle of billions of people around the world who are denied the right to health, well-being, and dignity.

This distressing state, which spans all regions and most countries, underscores the urgent need to invest in universal health coverage and protect people against financial hardship due to out-of-pocket health costs. Now more than ever, we must invest in UHC for countries that haven't reached it yet but also for countries that are struggling to maintain it.

Moreover, the World Health Organization (WHO) has identified climate change as humanity's biggest health threat. Yet, the majority of countries have not addressed climate risks or introduced climate resiliency in their health policies and planning. This is deeply concerning. The impact of climate change on health is already being felt and will only worsen if we do not take action now.

By adopting the Political Declaration at the UN High-level Meeting on UHC in September 2023, countries reaffirmed their commitment to accelerate progress towards achieving Health for All, recognizing that meeting the Sustainable Development Goals by 2030 is critical and impossible without achieving the health and well-being of all.

Universal Health Coverage and Health Security are intertwined goals: Universal Health Coverage based on Primary Health Care is also essential to protect people and communities from health emergencies and needs to be integrated as a guiding principle in the Pandemic Accord being currently negotiated by the WHO Intergovernmental Negotiating Body.

Now is the time to translate the commitment to UHC into concrete actions. Our future is at stake. We are calling on the Parliamentarians in our respective constituencies to take action to protect the fundamental right to health. We hope that you will support our call.

Specifically, we ask them to:

1. **Champion political leadership for UHC:** Ensure that everyone, everywhere has access to the health services they need, without facing financial hardship. This is a moral imperative and a smart investment that will pay dividends in the form of a healthier, more productive population.
2. **Adopt enabling laws and regulations:** Recognize the critical link between health and climate change and ensure that health considerations are central to climate change strategies. This includes building climate-resilient health systems and reducing greenhouse gas emissions in the health care sector.
3. **Invest in UHC:** Prioritize primary health care – with a focus on at risk communities – as it can deliver 90% of essential health services. With primary health care, our health systems can be better prepared to prevent and respond to health emergencies thanks to sufficient health workers, lab and data capacity, and basic services that can more rapidly detect and respond to outbreaks while continuing to deliver essential services.
4. **Strengthen the health and care workforce:** Invest in the education, employment, and retention of health workers, including by addressing existing shortages, and ensure decent pay and working conditions to ensure they are equipped to deliver high-quality health care.

5. **Institutionalize social participation in decision-making:** Ensure the inclusion of young people in the drafting, implementation, and evaluation of laws and policies that affect their health and wellbeing. This is the best way to ensure inclusive participation leading to policies that address our needs and concerns and trust in public action.
6. **Increase transparency and accountability:** Make data on UHC and the health impacts of climate change publicly available. This will allow us to track progress, improve accountability, and strengthen trustworthy data sharing.

We deserve a future where we are all physically and mentally healthy – flourishing together on a healthy planet. We trust that you will take our concerns seriously and act decisively. Thank you for your attention and for your continued action in achieving Health For All.

Sincerely,

Members of the WHO Youth Council

(see list of signatories below)

1. Kristina Almazidou, International Student One Health Alliance (ISOHA)
2. Whitney Gray, Digital Transformations for Health Lab (DTH-Lab)
3. Francesca Zanni, EURONET MRPH
4. Arwa Hany Sharaby, International Federation of Medical Students' Associations (IFMSA)
5. Sarah Neggazi, International Pharmaceutical Students' Federation (IPSF)
6. Marina Wainstein, International Society of Nephrology (ISN)
7. Katja Čič, International Youth Health Organization (YHO)
8. Emilo Christensen, World Federation of the Deaf Youth Section (WFDYS)
9. Marie-Claire Wangari, World Medical Association Junior Doctors Network (WMA JDN)
10. Alastair Hannaford, World Organization of the Scout Movement (WOSM)
11. Sonia Chedom, World YMCA
12. Yewo Grace Gondwe, Youth Coalition for Sexual and Reproductive Rights (YCSRR)
13. Alistair Mukondiwa, Youth Combating NTDs
14. Lucy Fagan, Major Group for Children and Youth (MGCY)