

Universal Health Coverage (UHC) in emergencies – a call to action

Meeting brief of official side event at 71st World Health assembly 21st May 2018

Background:

To deliver on our commitment to the goals of Universal Health coverage (UHC) and leaving no one behind, we must redouble efforts for over a billion people affected by fragility and conflict. In response to the urgent need for more coherent approaches bringing together humanitarian and development actors to expand coverage in conflict and crisis-affected situations and to protect health systems under attack, this multi-stakeholder event brought together Member States, technical, research and civil society partners.

Event summary:

The event was sponsored by the governments of Switzerland, Afghanistan, The Netherlands, Central African Republic, Guinea, Somalia, Canada and Nigeria with the support of the World Health Organisation (WHO), World Bank Group (WBG), International Health Partnership for UHC 2030 (UHC2030), International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC), International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies (IFRC), ReBUILD Research Consortium, and the Centre on Global Health Security at Chatham House.

The **objectives** were (i) to raise the profile of the UHC agenda in emergencies, and (ii) to learn from country experiences what it means to deliver, and advance towards UHC in fragile and conflict affected situations.

Mr. Alain Berset, President of the Swiss Confederation, stressed how attacks on healthcare deprive people of urgently needed care, contributing to the deterioration in the health and wellbeing of whole populations. He announced that Afghanistan and Switzerland would like to suggest a process for developing a concrete Call for Action: a commitment to accelerate progress towards UHC in emergencies. Further presentations were given by ministers of co-sponsoring countries, before a moderated discussion with representatives from the WHO, IFRC, World Bank Group, and the ReBUILD Research Consortium.

Key themes emerging from the meeting included:

- UHC in emergencies being part of a wider policy debate about **bridging the divide between short-term humanitarian and longer term development goals**.
- The need for **common principles and joined up efforts at country level**.
- The **importance of evidence to inform UHC during and after crises**, including how interventions during crises may impact longer-term outcomes.
- The **challenge of domestic resource mobilisation in crisis settings**, and that this may not be an option for UHC financing in the short/medium-term.
- That with appropriate strategies for UHC in crises, such as implementing packages, focusing on district health systems and strong country stewardship, **successful progress towards UHC in crises is possible**.

Next steps:

- The sponsors and organizers of the event are now planning the way forward for the Call to Action with a view to influencing intergovernmental and other processes, including the High Level Meeting on UHC in 2019.
- There may be a side event to launch the Call to Action at the UN General Assembly in September 2018
- Technical partners for this session will continue to collate and share evidence and learning on approaches, both individually and through the UHC2030 Technical Working Group on Fragile and Challenging Operating Environments and the HSG Thematic Working Group on Health Systems in Fragile and Conflict Affected States. Opportunities to move this agenda on include the Fifth Global Symposium on Health Systems Research in Liverpool in October 2018.