

A1. Defining UHC in the context of SDG3

What is UHC?

UHC will ensure that **all individuals and communities receive the health services they need without suffering financial hardship**. It comprises the full spectrum of essential, good-quality health services, from health promotion to prevention, treatment, rehabilitation and palliative care (13). It is firmly rooted in the notion that health is a human right, an entitlement of all people without discrimination to receive the highest attainable standard of health.

The principle of universality is crucial, as it ensures that **no one is left behind**. Hence, health systems must include a robust primary health-care approach that emphasizes equity in access to health services. Different schemes for selected populations undermine equity, universality and the principle of non-discrimination. They lead to fragmentation of health care and inequity in both allocation of resources and access to health-care services.

Thus, at policy level, health and health care must to be recognized as public goods and, ideally, mandated by legislation and/or become a constitutional right. Therefore, health must become a right for people if UHC is to be realized and no one is left behind for their health care needs. Further, achieving UHC is one of the targets set by the nations of the world when they adopted the SDGs in 2015. Countries that make progress towards UHC will also advance towards other health-related targets and the other goals. Good health allows children and adolescents to learn and adults to earn, helps people escape poverty and provides the basis for long-term economic development (13).

Making progress towards UHC will involve building and extending equitable, resilient, sustainable health systems, funded primarily by public finance and based on primary health care, that deliver integrated, comprehensive, people-centred, high-quality health services for all, with the necessary measures to protect households from the financial hazard of health expenditure. The effort should be led by national governments, according to national health policies and plans, building on and strengthening sector-wide processes to avoid fragmentation.

A short video on UHC is available [here](#)

UHC in the SDGs

UHC is a critical component of the SDGs, which include a specific health goal:

“Ensure healthy lives and promote well-being for all at all ages” (SDG 3). Within this health goal, target 3.8 is specifically to “Achieve UHC, including financial risk

protection, access to quality essential health care services and access to safe, effective, quality and affordable essential medicines and vaccines for all” (1).

While UHC is the focus of target 3.8, it brings together all the health issue-, disease- and population-specific health targets in an integrated approach to strengthen health systems and provide comprehensive health care without financial hardship. It is therefore often presented as an “umbrella” for SDG3. The global movement for UHC is supported by a wide range of international and domestic actors, including multilateral organizations, bilateral organizations, national governments and non-state networks and actors.

Making progress towards UHC will help countries to advance towards other health-related targets and the other goals, such as eliminating extreme poverty (SDG 1), educational outcomes (SDG 4), gender equality (SDG 5), economic growth (SDG 8) and effective institutions (SDG 16) (14). Further, SDG 17 and its targets 17.1–17.5 emphasize strengthening of finances in all their dimensions, including international aid commitments, as, without such resource commitments, both the SDGs and UHC will remain mere statements.

SDG target 16.6 goes further by emphasizing the importance of both transparency and accountability. Transparency is important for accountability beyond parliaments, including to citizens. The target is to “develop effective, accountable and transparent institutions at all levels”, while the related indicator 16.6.1 is defined as primary government expenditure as a proportion of original approved budget, by sector (or budget code or similar), and indicator 16.6.2 addresses the percentage of the population satisfied with their latest experience of public services (15).