

WORLD HEALTH DAY, 2019

April 7

UNIVERSAL HEALTH: FOR ALL, EVERYWHERE

This World Health Day (WHD), 2019, asks us to act on Universal Health Coverage (UHC) to ensure that all people, everywhere, have access to medical services and basic health care. UHC is an important part of actions and policies that governments and all of us need to participate in to modify the social determination of health. UHC is a major contribution to equity in access to essential information, services and medicines which are vital elements in antibiotic resistance containment strategies.

ReAct Latin America, The International Society to Improve the Use of Medicines and the National Front for the Health of the Peoples of Ecuador, together support the call to make Universal Health Coverage a reality. We also celebrate WHD as an opportunity to reflect on the concept of Universal Health itself.

We can see from the 10 great threats to global health identified by WHO, just how important UHC is to enable diagnosis and management of the diseases such as diabetes, cancer, heart disease, and

threats to the lung, heart, brain, and cardiovascular system from air pollution, as well as HIV, new pandemics and outbreaks of flu, dengue, and other deadly pathogens. People need access to effective treatments for diseases. Effective and safe treatment also means needed medicines must be used wisely. Antimicrobial resistance, another of the 10 great threats to global health threatens the effective prevention and treatment of an ever-increasing range of infections

caused by bacteria, parasites, viruses and fungi. While antibiotics are a pillar upon which our health stands, new treatments for resistant infections are needed. But prevention of infections through good living conditions and good healthcare, are also a high priority and an essential part of Universal Health Coverage.

WHO identified weak primary health care systems as one of the other great threats to global health. Growing strong



Photography: <https://andina.pe/agencia/noticia.aspx?id=469943>



A child from the Ecuadorian Andes must travel several kilometers to get water for their survival. The problem of safe water limits access to universal health coverage.

Photography: Juan Carlos López, Ecuador. ReAct LA

primary health care systems is a fundamental part of enabling UHC to ensure access to medical services. Here trusted local health care workers can assist communities with their concerns about vaccination (vaccine hesitancy is another key threat), turning overuse of antibiotics into appropriate use of antibiotics, and improving the wise selection and use of medicines and other therapeutic and preventive strategies.

The 10 great global threats also make us think about health for all in another way. 90% of the world's population breathe polluted air every day. It is the greatest environmental risk to global health. 22 % of people in the world live in fragile places, made vulnerable by protracted crises from conflict, natural disaster and and population displacement. 70% of the world's population suffers from diabetes, cardiovascular disease and cancer driven by five major risk factors: tobacco use, physical inactivity, the harmful use of alcohol, unhealthy diets and air pollution. These risk factors also exacerbate mental health issues.

Our global and local environments are major risks to our health and to that of the planet. The

underlying determinants of many health issues for which we need Universal Access to health services show us just how interconnected we all are and also that people in low and middle income countries suffer the greatest burden. About 100 million people are pushed into extreme poverty each year because of out-of-pocket spending on health. The World Bank projects that an additional 24.1 million people could fall into extreme poverty by 2050 because of antibiotic resistance alone, most of these people would come from low- and middle-income countries. People living in poverty are not only more vulnerable to antibiotic resistance, but are also less able to prevent or treat antibiotic-resistant infections.

Preventive measures for many of these high threat diseases highlights the importance of food security and sovereignty for universal access to good quality healthy food. This is also an essential axis of universal health coverage.

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Therefore WHD is an urgent opportunity to connect the idea of Universal Health Coverage to the idea of Universal Health. Universal action for prevention and for Health For All turns our attention to our commitment to planetary health. Comprehensive Health for All is only possible by recognizing that human beings are in relationship to others and to all forms

of life. Antibiotic resistance illustrates this powerfully. ABR is a complex, multifaceted problem that affects everyone. As a medical, social, ecological, environmental and economic problem, it needs to be addressed as a whole. A unified and integral response, oriented to contain the increase and accelerated diffusion of bacterial resistance and to preserve the effective-

ness of antibiotics, needs also to promote the health of all 'as a whole'. Here, 'Health For All' must take on another meaning beyond Health For All Human Beings to reflect the dynamic interconnectedness of the ecosystems and restore or support the health and life of plants, animals, humans, microbes and ecosystems. Recent work in biology shows the increasing

Recognize the interconnections between all beings, and between human beings and all other forms of life is a step to achieve universal health.

Photography: Sasin Tipchai. <https://pixabay.com/images/id-1822662/>





understanding of collectivity and cooperative communication. Therefore WHD is an opportunity to reflect urgently on our concept of health and medicine. Can there be Universal Health Coverage without including the health of the planet? It is time to talk about planetary health – meaning the health of human beings, plants, animals and environments – focusing on the fundamental role of primary health care on the pathway to universal health.

WHD is a time to think about the terms we use, and not in an isolated way. We need to have our terms clear in our conceptions of health and therapeutic and preventative strategies. The pathways may be quite different.

We propose to begin a dialogue bringing community members together with health professionals, healers and others to explore what we mean by health and medicine and how we can work in a practical ways to overcome unnecessary conflicts, confusion and practices in working for Health of All.

We want to create a conducive setting for reflection, to rethink and recreate the concept of health and medicine. Most people, everywhere, want harmony, no war, liberty and equilibrium. They want to be respected. How can we foster mutual respect between human beings and respect for other forms of life? Human health depends on planetary health and we need to examine how Rights of Human beings require Rights of Nature to be respected.

By UHC, we understand more than that all people, everywhere, have access to essential medical services. We can urgently work towards ensuring health for all, including the ecosystems of the planet on which we, animals, plants and biosystem processes depend. If UHC is only seen as access by all people to medical services, then to deliver these in time in response to the rapidly changing causes of illhealth, outlined in WHO's list of threats, will grow the power of technological solutions, and that of the industries that provide them, without addressing the underlying causes and the degrading health of the planet.

