

# HelpAge briefing for the High Level Meeting on Universal Health Coverage



Mauro Vombe/Fairpicture/HelpAge International

**Universal health coverage (UHC) is defined as everyone, everywhere enjoying access to the health services they need without suffering financial hardship.** Progress towards UHC is essential for promoting healthy ageing, delivering social and economic development, and building resilient and equitable societies that respond effectively in times of crisis – whether pandemics, climate crisis or other threats to global health security.

Alongside action to address factors that shape our health and wellbeing across the life-course and tackle the root causes of poverty and inequality, the commitment of governments to achieve UHC within Sustainable Development Goal 3.8 aligns directly with their duty to fulfil all people’s right to the highest attainable standard of physical and mental health.

By 2030, 1.4 billion people will be aged 60 and over. Yet the majority of health and care systems worldwide remain unprepared for population ageing and associated increases in rates of non-communicable diseases (NCDs) and disability. This is particularly true in low- and middle-income countries where over 70% of older people live. Today, millions of older people in these countries are unable to access the services they need or are pushed into poverty doing so, while critical opportunities for promoting healthy ageing across the life-course are being missed.

**Older people in low- and middle-income countries are among those with the greatest need for health and care services, but the furthest behind in accessing them.**

**Almost 1 billion people each year face catastrophic health spending, with older households most at risk.**

Source: WHO and World Bank, *Tracking universal health coverage 2021 Global Monitoring Report*

**Urgent action is needed to accelerate progress towards UHC in low- and middle-income countries and to reorient systems everywhere to be fit for an ageing world.**

**Key calls for government for the High-Level Meeting (HLM) on UHC:**

- Ensure **Heads of States attend the HLM and commit to invest in and accelerate progress towards UHC**, recognising that UHC, founded upon a strong primary health care system, is essential for promoting healthy ageing and building resilient and equitable societies that respond effectively in times of crisis.
- Promote a **human rights-based approach to UHC** and **ensure the goal of equity within and between countries** guides funding and decision making at all levels, with a focus on reaching those who are the furthest behind first. This must include **commitment from governments of high-income countries to scale-up action that enables greater public financing for UHC in lower income countries** as part of universal social protection mechanisms, including by action to deliver tax, trade and debt justice.
- **Champion age-, gender- and disability-responsive systems** that address the barriers older people face to accessing services, including those related to availability, accessibility, acceptability and quality, and ageism and age discrimination, whilst taking multi-sectoral action to address social determinants of health and drivers of poverty and inequality.
- **Invest in primary health care and community-based services** as the most effective way of delivering comprehensive, accessible, integrated and person-centred care that supports people's physical, mental and cognitive health and wellbeing across the life-course.
- Scale-up efforts to respond to older people's need for **integrated promotive, preventive, curative, rehabilitative, palliative, specialised and long-term care and support services**, and **access to medicines, vaccines and assistive technologies** that promote healthy ageing.
- **Remove discriminatory upper age caps** from data systems and collect, analyse, report and use **sex, age and disability disaggregated data** on older people's health and care needs to inform equity-based decision making.
- **Meaningfully engage and empower older people** and those working with them in UHC processes at all levels to achieve health and wellbeing for all at all ages.

---

**HelpAge International is a global network of organisations promoting the right of all older people to lead dignified, healthy and secure lives.**

For more information see our report **Achieving Universal Health Coverage fit for an ageing world** or contact Camilla Williamson, Global healthy ageing adviser at [Camilla.Williamson@helpage.org](mailto:Camilla.Williamson@helpage.org)

**[www.helpage.org](http://www.helpage.org)**

Registered charity no. 288180



@HelpAge



HelpAge International