



To: Heads of States, Ministries of Health and Ministries of Finance

Date: Thursday 12 December 2024

Subject: Investing in Universal Health Coverage to meet the needs and uphold the rights of older people

Dear Excellencies, Heads of States, Ministers of Health and Ministers of Finance,

On Universal Health Coverage (UHC) day, we are writing to ask for your urgent investment in UHC and action to ensure it meets the needs and upholds the rights of those furthest behind first, including older people.

Older people are among those with the greatest need for health and care services, yet often furthest behind in accessing them.

The UHC Global Monitoring Report from the World Health Organization and the World Bank Group shows that half the world's population still lacks access to health services, while 2 billion people face severe financial hardship when paying out-of-pocket for the services and products they needed, with older households among those most at risk. Older people also face additional barriers to enjoying their right to health, including those related to the availability, accessibility, acceptability and quality of health and care services, as well as ageism and age discrimination in their funding, design and delivery.

Universal Health Coverage cannot be achieved without meeting the needs and upholding the rights of increasing numbers of older people globally.

By 2030, 1.4 billion people will be aged 60 or over, rising to 2.1 billion by 2050 – or 22 per cent of the global population. Yet the majority of health and care systems worldwide remain unprepared for meeting older people's more complex needs and delivering integrated, person-centred and community-based services that promote healthy ageing for all.

Responses to the Decade of Healthy Ageing progress survey from 134 countries in 2023 revealed that only 27 per cent reported adequate resources for delivering person-centred and integrated care for older people, while almost two thirds (63 per cent) reported that they lack cross-sectional, nationally representative data on older people's health and care needs collected since 2010. Only 54 per cent of 194 countries surveyed by WHO report in 2021 reported general availability of 11 essential medicines for NCDs which are more common in later life.

Investing in UHC can help ensure our longer lives are healthier ones.

Investing in UHC is essential for promoting health and wellbeing, delivering social and economic development, and building resilient and equitable societies that respond effectively in times of crisis. As populations age, investment in UHC can also help ensure that our longer lives are

healthier ones. Yet today, we see a growing gap between life expectancy and healthy life expectancy, leading to a greater proportion of people's life spent in ill health or with a disability.

To reap the benefits of healthy ageing for people, systems and societies, we must invest in UHC fit for an ageing world.

In 2023, Heads of States and Governments committed to accelerate progress towards UHC. The UHC political declaration also committed governments to '*Scale up efforts to develop, implement and evaluate policies and programmes that promote healthy and active ageing, maintain and improve quality of life of older persons and to identify and respond to the growing needs of the rapidly ageing population*'.

Alongside action to address factors that shape our health and wellbeing across the life-course and tackle the root causes of poverty and inequality, investing in UHC that meets the needs and upholds the rights of older people is critical to turn these commitments into action and promote health for all at all ages.

We therefore call on governments and health actors at all levels to scale up investment in UHC and to champion age- and disability-inclusive and gender-responsive health and care systems that deliver equitable, integrated and person-centred services, founded upon strong primary health care approaches promoting healthy ageing for all.

This must include:

- **Addressing the barriers older people face to enjoying their right to health**, including those related to the availability, accessibility, acceptability and quality of services, as well as ageism and age discrimination in their funding, design and delivery.
- **Protecting older people from financial hardship by abolishing out of pocket spending on health for older populations**, recognising them as the age group most at risk of catastrophic health expenditure.
- **Ensuring UHC benefit packages support all older people to access integrated health and care services that meet their needs**, from promotion and prevention, to treatment, rehabilitation, palliative care and long-term care and support, and access to necessary medicines, vaccines and assistive products with financial protection.
- **Investing in the building blocks of a health system fit for purpose in an ageing world**, including Service delivery; Workforce; Medical products, vaccines, and assistive technologies; Data and information systems; Financing; and Leadership and governance.
- **Promoting a rights-based approach to UHC**, ensuring the voices of all groups, including older people, are heard within the design and delivery of health and care services at all levels.

For more information on the barriers older people face to enjoying their right to health and how we can collectively advance progress towards achieving UHC fit for an ageing world please visit [Universal Health Coverage - HelpAge International](#).

We look forward to working with you to turn this vision into reality.

Yours sincerely,
[List of co-signatories]