

Primary Health Care for Universal Health Coverage in Pakistan

A joint statement by health and development partners on supporting the Government of the Islamic Republic of Pakistan in strategic collaboration to achieve universal health coverage, focusing on primary health care

Islamabad, 5 March 2021

“The enjoyment of the highest attainable standard of health is one of the fundamental rights of every human being.” To help realize this fundamental right, which is enshrined in the WHO Constitution, 12 multilateral health, development and humanitarian agencies in the Eastern Mediterranean/Middle East and North Africa Regions, hosted by WHO, have launched the Regional Health Alliance¹ to accelerate the achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) by implementing the Global Action Plan on Healthy Lives and Well-being for All (GAP).²

Partners under the Regional Health Alliance, as well as representatives of the Government of Pakistan, other local and international development partners and civil society representatives, convened in Islamabad from 1 to 5 March 2021 to renew their commitment to supporting Pakistan in moving towards universal health coverage (UHC) through primary health care (PHC), review current progress, identify priorities and align and coordinate their support.

This joint statement builds on global and regional commitments that place PHC at the centre of efforts to achieve UHC and the health-related SDGs. The **Astana Declaration** (2018) recognizes that PHC provides a platform for accessible, affordable, equitable, integrated, quality primary care and public health services for all. It supports multisectoral action for health and engages people and communities in their own health and well-being. The **United Nations General Assembly Political Declaration on UHC** (2019) reaffirms that PHC is the cornerstone of a sustainable health system. All countries within the Eastern Mediterranean Region signed the **Salalah Declaration and UHC2030 Global Compact** in September 2018, committing to collective action towards UHC through building equitable, resilient and sustainable health systems.

PHC strengthening and health financing reforms are key priorities for federal and provincial governments in Pakistan. Improving the coverage and functionality of PHC is a strategic priority in the **National Health Vision 2016–25** and **provincial health strategies**.

Delivering on PHC requires collective action across stakeholders and sectors, led by government at the federal and provincial levels. To this end, signatory development partners, including WHO, UNICEF, GAVI, the Global Fund, the Global Financing Facility, UNAIDS, UNFPA, the World Bank and several bilateral development partners, commit to continuing support for priority PHC reforms in Pakistan, with community-based PHC (communities and community-based workers) at the front, gender intentionality, health information systems, human resources for health, essential health commodities, equitable and resilient access to health services, societal partnerships between civil society and government with shared accountability, and health care quality improvement. In our mission, we have observed specific strategic opportunities to enhance collaboration among partners working on PHC and sustainable financing for health and identified evidence-informed priorities for joint implementation with relevant partners and programmes.

The Government of Pakistan’s UHC Investment Case sets out six key reforms that will underpin the implementation of the UHC Benefit Package. The findings of this mission have reinforced the validity and importance of these proposed reforms for effective and efficient delivery. Specifically, these are:

- strengthening district governance – which is crucial for effective coordination and leadership of PHC at district level;
- achieving a progressive increase and diversification of UHC financing, prioritizing the community and primary levels;
- strengthening human resources for health – taking a province-driven approach that prioritizes the PHC workforce, including lady health workers;
- ensuring the supply of essential commodities;
- ensuring equitable and resilient access to health services – including through innovative strategies for hard-to-reach populations and behaviour change interventions; and
- improving health care quality in both the public and private sectors, by implementing accountability and performance frameworks for both the public and private sectors, and strengthening the role of the Health Commission in this.

As signatories of this joint statement, we renew our commitment to a more aligned approach towards PHC for UHC, including through the Global Action Plan for Healthy Lives and Well-being for All and the Regional Health Alliance. We will continue to work together to build a sustainable PHC model, based on the three pillars of (i) primary care and public health functions at the core of integrated health services, (ii) multisectoral policy and action, and (iii) empowered people and communities. We take note of the lessons learned through the COVID-19 pandemic response: the need to build a resilient health system that takes PHC as cornerstone and nurtures emergency preparedness.

Effective and sustainable PHC is the cornerstone for achieving the health-related SDG targets. We reaffirm our joint commitment to stronger collaboration for better health in Pakistan. To better support Pakistan to achieve health and well-being for all by 2030 at federal and provincial levels, we specifically affirm our intention to:

- i. Align technical support to foster the stewardship of the government of Pakistan in implementing its national strategies, plans and reforms in order to optimize the impact of our collective investments. We will focus especially on aligning support for implementation of the **UHC Benefit Package**, endorsed by the Inter-Ministerial Health and Population Council on 23 October 2020, which sets out Pakistan’s package of essential health services configured around PHC and extending UHC coverage in an equitable manner to all those who need it.
- ii. Support the Government of Pakistan to finalize and agree a **UHC Investment Case** to provide a shared investment framework, and align our financial and programmatic support to priorities within it.
- iii. Align our support to government monitoring systems based on evidence generated through programmatic data as well as through research, and build national capacity for assessment-based PHC improvement, based on the **PHC Measurement and Improvement Initiative** (PHCMI) launched recently in Pakistan.
- iv. Strengthen multi-partner and multi-stakeholder coordination mechanisms, including empowering communities to enable their meaningful involvement, to support the Government of Pakistan to develop a national **PHC for UHC Compact** that sets out agreed contributions and ways of working for all health partners.

¹ **About the Regional Health Alliance**

To support countries in accelerating progress towards the health-related SDGs and facilitate implementation of the Global Action Plan on Healthy Lives and Well-being for All, 12 multilateral health, development and humanitarian agencies in the Eastern Mediterranean/Middle East and North African Regions have launched the Regional Health Alliance. The Alliance is hosted by WHO, and implementation of joint activities involves the engagement of additional health and development partners, including civil society organizations.

For more information on the “Regional Health Alliance and its work to support the vision of Health For All By All, visit www.emro.who.int/media/news/the-regional-health-alliance-a-partnership-towards-achieving-health-for-all-by-all.html.

² **About the Global Action Plan for Healthy Lives and Well-being for All**

The Global Action Plan for Healthy Lives and Well-being for All brings together 13 multilateral health, development and humanitarian agencies to better support countries to accelerate progress towards the health-related SDGs. Under the Global Action Plan, the agencies are better aligning their ways of working to reduce inefficiencies and provide more streamlined support to countries. Through the Plan, agencies will support countries to deliver on the health-related SDGs and related international commitments to health.

For more information on the Global Action Plan and its work to support stronger collaboration and better health, visit <https://www.who.int/initiatives/sdg3-global-action-plan>.