

CMAAO Penang Resolution on Universal Health Coverage (UHC)

The right to health is now generally recognized as a fundamental Human Right by most countries. The Sustainable Development Goal, SDG 3 mandates governments to “ensure healthy lives and promote well-being for all at all stages”.

Universal health coverage (UHC) means that all people and communities can use the promotive, preventive, curative, rehabilitative and palliative health services they need, of sufficient quality to be effective, while also ensuring that the use of these services does not expose the user to financial hardship. (WHO)

The basis of a universal health coverage is primary health care ideally provided by a team of health professionals and health care workers led by primary care physician with the health needs of their patients and communities at the centre. This team should be supported by other specialists and provides access to secondary and tertiary care as well as technical and social services.

The funding of such a system can be provided by different means; including tax financing, private or social insurance, health savings accounts, out-of-pocket expenses or combinations of the above.

Role of governments

Governments should act on the Social Determinants of Health, by enabling a healthy start into life, decent living conditions, quality education, safe and healthy environments including access to healthy nutrition, safe workplaces and transportation.

Regardless of the methodology chosen, the government should ensure that the patients can access timely, competent and quality health care services whenever they need it and without any financial hardship.

The access to health care includes the coverage of essential diagnostics, medications and devices; access to rehabilitation and palliation. The patient should have freedom of choice in the access, especially when it comes to selecting the primary care physician.

While the financing mechanisms may vary between nations and over time, the government should ensure that a transparent health system is always in place. Such a system must cover every member of society and must not discriminate against those with congenital or pre-existing conditions.

Payments and/or reimbursements to health institutions, health professionals and health care workers, must be fair and appropriate.

While disease patterns change from acute episodic illnesses to chronic processes, health care systems must not fall from one silo-structure to another. Universal Health Coverage requires a universal or holistic

approach to patients understanding them as persons in their families, groups and communities.

Thus, the role of the physicians extends to be an advocate for healthy living conditions, healthy lifestyles and wellness of all members of the communities. Attention should be directed to the Social Determinants of Health as well as to identifiable causes of illness, injury and disease; and to general health promotion, health education and specific prevention.

Role of NMAs

NMAs should promote Universal Health Coverage by explaining to physicians the benefit of UHC for their patients and communities and to encourage the leadership role that physicians should take to make this possible.

NMAs should analyze current and foreseeable health demands of the people and thereafter target appropriate Educational programs for health professionals on prevention, health promotion and nutrition.

NMAs should reach out to politicians, the media and stakeholders to advocate for Universal Health Care and explain that expenditure for health care is not just a cost but an investment in the future of every society.