

BRIEFING PAPER

Universal Health Coverage and Pandemic Prevention, Preparedness and Response

APRIL 2023

This briefing paper aims to serve as the resource for the upcoming High-Level Meetings (HLM) on Universal Health Coverage (UHC) and Pandemic Prevention, Preparedness and Response (PPR). It lays out joint priorities areas and puts forward distinct “asks” for the HLM on PPR.

What is the link between UHC and PPR?

Based on universally accessible and affordable health care for all people, Universal Health Coverage (UHC) is the foundation of equitable pandemic prevention, preparedness, and response (PPR) and contributes essential functions to each aspect — preparedness, prevention, and response. UHC and pandemic PPR are also mutually supportive agendas requiring whole-of-government, whole-of-society approaches and top-level political commitment. Both rely on strong, resilient health systems that provide skilled personnel, facilities and equipment, data and communication systems, laboratory facilities, and supply chains that protect everyone, including the most vulnerable, and can identify and respond to emerging crises.

Prevention

Effective UHC ensures that immunizations, screenings, and diagnostics are available to and affordable for everyone everywhere – including in emergencies – curbing vaccine-preventable diseases and preventing and initiating care for chronic conditions. It provides older populations and those with underlying health issues—who were most at risk of death during COVID-19—with the support they need to stay as healthy and safe as possible, increasing their resilience in the face of emerging health threats.

Preparedness

UHC ensures that well-trained and well-equipped personnel and systems needed for emergency response are firmly in place before a crisis hits. These include disease surveillance, data collection, and laboratories that regularly monitor the health of communities and can quickly identify anomalies. These same systems will track a potential health emergency to ensure resources are targeted to the geographies and populations that need them the most.

Response

UHC furnishes skilled health personnel—from the community level to laboratorians to hospital and long-term care staff—who can be the first to identify a potential epidemic and trigger a response. It promotes regular contact with health care providers who remain trusted resources for care and guidance during a health emergency, a much-needed bulwark against mis- and disinformation. Supply chains and immunization systems routinely used under UHC can ramp up the distribution of epidemic supplies and countermeasures to all who need them. The resilient health systems required by UHC will be in a better position to maintain routine care during crisis response and avoid health system collapse. The critical need for this resilience was felt during the COVID-19 pandemic when among other disruptions to the health care system, 25 million children were denied routine vaccinations.

Why do we also need a high-level declaration on PPR?

UHC provides the foundation for equitable pandemic preparedness and response. However, it has not been sufficiently financed or equipped for the multisectoral shock of an acute, nationwide event that can rapidly overwhelm even the best-equipped health systems. As demonstrated during COVID-19, PPR also requires intense investment in economic and social planning, protection, and international cooperation. The risk of another pandemic threat and an even more deadly and devastating pandemic is higher than ever, fueled by increasing population density and mobility and environmental degradation. Urgent political leadership and international cooperation are required to muster the additional financing, coordination, and political will to prevent, prepare, and respond to the next crisis, to complement ongoing efforts to accelerate progress towards UHC.

What outcomes do we want to see from the High-Level Meeting on PPR?

Avoiding a repetition of the tragedy caused by COVID-19 requires laying the groundwork now for future prevention, preparedness and response. UHC is an essential underpinning of PPR, as is investing in and sustaining of PPR specific activities at the local, national, regional, and international levels. We are calling for a concise, action-oriented political declaration which commits to a cohesive package of reforms to PPR and political leadership. The upcoming High-Level Meeting and political declaration should:

- **Articulate a cohesive, shared, and multisectoral approach to strengthening Pandemic PPR at national, regional, and global levels.** This must include committing to a whole-of-government and whole-of-society effort that includes concerted action at the animal-animal and animal-human interface using a One Health approach.
- **Reinforce, advance and bolster international Pandemic PPR initiatives already under way,** including the Pandemic Accord negotiations and the amendments to the International Health Regulations.
- **Endorse the creation of a standing head-of-government and head-of-state level council** to drive cohesive, ongoing vigilance and concerted action on current and future pandemic threats.
- **Secure commitment to a new global pandemic countermeasures framework** to ensure timely, equitable, and affordable access to pandemic-related products and public health interventions for all.
- **Secure commitment from all nations to mobilize domestic financing for health systems, as well as additional, sustainable preparedness and surge financing for Pandemic PPR as a global public good,** including at least the US\$10.5B required annually for preparedness, and up to \$100 billion available for surge financing in case of a crisis. Such financing should involve international and regional institutions.
- **Secure commitment to ensure a well-functioning, sustainably financed WHO to support countries to reduce the risk of health emergencies and minimize their consequences, together with the recognition that all relevant UN agencies have roles to play in Pandemic PPR.**
- **Secure agreement on a robust independent monitoring and accountability framework,** including a commitment to hold a follow-up summit at the 2024 UN General Assembly to assess progress and gaps.