

African Health Ministers commit to attain universal health coverage

67th Session of the WHO

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USPA NEWS - African health ministers meeting in Zimbabwe for the 67th Session of the World Health Organization (WHO) Regional Committee have adopted a range of actions intended to strengthen health systems in countries and eventually lead to Universal Health Coverage (UHC). UHC means that all individuals and communities receive the health services they need without suffering financial hardship. It enables everyone to access the services that address the most important causes of disease and death, and ensures that these services are of sufficient quality to be effective.

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UHC is the eighth target under Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) 3 that was adopted in September 2015 by the United Nations General Assembly to guide global development by 2030. To achieve UHC, WHO advises Member States to build strong and resilient health systems that can ensure public health security, can deal with effects of climate change and are capable of ending deadly epidemics such as Ebola. Such health systems require good health stewardship, adequate financing for health, qualified and motivated health workforce, access to quality medicines and health products, functional health information systems and people-centred service delivery systems. Introducing the action framework, the Director of the Health System & Services Cluster at the WHO Regional Office for Africa, Dr Dovlo said: "UHC is the foundation for healthier communities, stronger economies and our collective security. It calls for renewed commitment and concrete actions to ensure that national health systems in the Region are well funded and aligned with the changing needs and expectations. This will ensure that health is playing its role in facilitating the attainment of sustainable development"^[2]. In the ensuing deliberations, the ministers agreed to implement the six comprehensive framework actions in their countries that will contribute fundamentally to attainment of UHC. They include improving availability of essential services needed to sustain health for all people and to increase their coverage so that all people can easily access them. The ministers agreed to make renewed efforts to protect people from catastrophic health expenditures caused by use of health services. In addition, they will focus on promoting client satisfaction and effective health security.-----

The Region is experiencing demographic, economic, social, security and environmental changes that place unique and varied demands on health. The Ministers highlighted some of the challenges that lie ahead in the context of implementing the framework. These are actions that would require engagement with other sectors that have significant influence on health outcomes. They also noted the double burden of diseases that involves dealing with the rising numbers of individuals with Non-communicable diseases while tackling communicable diseases and the importance of the social and commercial determinants of health. The ministers also recognized the complexity brought about by population changes that will result in high numbers of both young and elderly people with unique health needs. They further noted that this alignment of health systems with changing needs would require good quality human resources, effective governance, and improved organization and management of health services. Despite the challenges, the ministers acknowledged the substantial improvements in health outcomes achieved over the last 25 years on the continent. Improvements were also noted in the overall financing for health which may have contributed to a reduction in out-of-pocket expenditures. With apo, and World Health Organization (WHO).

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