

# Ensuring Health for All-A Call to Action on Universal Health Coverage Day

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DOI: 10.55489/njmr.150120251055

**How to cite this article:** Gharat V. Ensuring Health for All - A Call to Action on Universal Health Coverage Day. Natl J Med Res 2025;15(01):1-1. DOI: 10.55489/njmr.150120251055

Every year on December 12th, the world observes Universal Health Coverage (UHC) Day, a global initiative to emphasize the critical need for accessible and affordable health care for all. This year's theme, "**Health, It's on Government,**" underscores the pivotal role of governments in ensuring that no one is forced to choose between essential needs such as health care and food.

The World Health Organization has once again called on nations to address the pressing need for universal health coverage. The vision behind UHC is simple yet profound: to provide access to quality health services for everyone, everywhere, without financial hardship. However, achieving this vision remains an uphill battle.

Over the past two decades, global efforts towards universal health coverage have stagnated. Currently, over 2 billion people face financial barriers to accessing health care, and 1.3 billion lives are lost annually due to lack of timely medical intervention. Out-of-pocket health expenditures remain a significant contributor to poverty worldwide, forcing countless families to delay or forgo life-saving treatments. For many middle-class households, spending over 10% of their income on health care pushes them towards financial instability. The impact is even starker in less affluent regions such as the Eastern Mediterranean, where two-thirds of the population lacks access to essential health services.

## Health Is a Human Right

The WHO firmly reiterates that health is a fundamental human right, and governments bear the responsibility of protecting their citizens from the financial devastation associated with health conditions. A robust commitment to UHC will not only improve individual health outcomes but also strengthen societal resilience, boost economic productivity, and enhance workforce participation.

The stakes are high. Without universal access to health care, achieving broader social and economic development goals will remain unattainable. Universal Health Coverage Day serves as a clarion call for governments to prioritize health in their national agendas. The target is clear: by 2030, no one should face financial hardship due to health care needs.

## Steps for Governments to Take

To achieve this ambitious goal, governments must take decisive action. Implement laws that safeguard citizens from catastrophic health care expenditures. Allocate sufficient budgetary resources to provide an affordable and inclusive package of essential health services. Establish universal health systems financed through public funds to ensure equitable access. Reduce or eliminate out-of-pocket expenses, particularly for the most vulnerable populations. Strengthen health insurance systems to promote equity, stimulate economic growth, and build resilient societies.

## A Shared Responsibility

UHC is not just a health agenda; it is a moral imperative. Governments worldwide must rise to the occasion, recognizing that investing in health care is an investment in their nations' futures. Prioritizing health ensures not only better health outcomes but also stronger, more equitable societies.

As we mark Universal Health Coverage Day 2024, let us urge our leaders to commit to making health care accessible and affordable for all. Because health is not a privilege; it is a right. And ensuring this right is, indeed, on the government.

*The time to act is now.*

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**Publisher:** Medsci Publications [www.medscipublications.com]

ISSN: 2249 4995

Official website: www.njmr.in