

Portugal

World Health Organization
73rd Session of the World Health Assembly
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Committee A – Item 11.2 Universal Health Coverage
Geneva, 11th November 2020

Chair,

Director General,

Excellencies,

I have the honour to address the 73rd World Health Assembly on behalf of Portugal.

We align with previous statement by the European Union.

Portugal recognizes Health as a fundamental human right and as a means to achieving the end of poverty, increase equality and share prosperity. This puts Universal Health Coverage at the heart of the 2030 Agenda.

We would like to commend the UHC Report, congratulating the achievements - namely the global increase of coverage of essential health services - but also highlighting the tasks that remain. The steady increase in out-of-pocket health spending (including catastrophic health expenditure) between 2000 and 2015, and the unequal health challenges affecting the most vulnerable are especially worrying.

The severe recession caused by COVID-19 is aggravating disruptions in essential health services (e.g. routine immunisation, prevention programmes and health promotion services) while also putting hard-earned progresses at risk.

Chair,

The 72nd WHA approved by consensus a resolution (which Portugal co-sponsored and was one of its author) promoting transparency in the markets of medicines, vaccines and other health products with a view to improving access to all. The COVID-19 pandemic hard-pressed us into the urgent need to collaborate; to devise and fast-track research; and to develop and deliver effective medical products to fight the pandemic at a global level. We would like to commend

the efforts of WHO and other actors in creating the ACT-A platform, and particularly the COVAX facility.

Models suggest that 28% more deaths can be averted if an effective vaccine is distributed globally and equitably. We are ethically obliged to adopt collaborative and cooperative strategies, tackling high prices (namely by being transparent with research and production costs), and avoiding inequitable access for the new vaccines within and among Member States. This too can be a way to accomplish UHC.

Chair,

While the path to Universal Health Coverage is specific to each country, it cannot be attained without affordable, quality primary healthcare. Health systems based on a strong primary health care have more efficiency, quality and fairness, producing higher value and better health outcomes.

Therefore, reminded of the importance of putting primary care and essential public health functions at the core of integrated health services, we applaud the creation of WHO's special programme on primary healthcare. Coordinating and ramping up investment in this area means more resources to early detect and treat conditions, preventing them from becoming more serious. This will not only save lives but also reduce health costs.

We ask the secretariat to increase efforts to mobilise resources, including aligned international cooperation, and ensure their efficient and equitable allocation to essential public health programmes and good health sector governance.

Ultimately, Universal Health Coverage can only be achieved by taking an integrated, whole-of-government approach, supporting communities, improving education and broadening social services. All are drivers of health and included in 2030 Agenda.

Thank you

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