

Agenda Item: 13.1 Universal Health Coverage

Belize is committed to achieving Universal Health Coverage and has been strengthening its health systems towards this achievement. Universal health coverage means that everyone receives quality health services, when and where they need them, without incurring financial hardship. To monitor Universal Health Coverage, there are two indicators that are being monitored together: UHC essential service coverage index (SDG indicator 3.8.1) and catastrophic health spending (SDG indicator 3.8.2), along with out-of-pocket expenditures.

The UHC essential service coverage index for Belize has been increasing over time and was estimated at 67% in 2019 using a scale of 0 to 100, set by WHO. This is defined as the average coverage of essential services based on tracer interventions that include reproductive, maternal, newborn and child health, infectious diseases, noncommunicable diseases and service capacity and access, among the general and the most disadvantaged population. As a measure of SDG indicator 3.8.1, the UHC service coverage index combines 14 tracer indicators of service coverage into a single summary measure. This indicates that while this indicator has been improving over time, there is still great work ahead as we continue the movement towards achieving Universal Health Coverage by undertaking relevant reforms in the health sector.

In addition, according to the WHO Global Health Expenditure database, government health spending in Belize as a percentage of health spending has been progressively increasing over the years from 53.1% in 2005 to 71.8 in 2020, with out-of-pocket spending decreasing over this 15-year period from 32% in 2005 to 21.9% in 2020. This indicates that the increased government investments in health is relieving individuals' out-of-pocket expenditures and decreasing the financial burden of healthcare, especially for vulnerable groups.

Efforts are being made to strengthen the primary health care approach and improve financing for health including the expansion of the coverage under the National Health Insurance scheme. Let me say that approximately 35% of the population is already covered by a National Health Insurance for primary health care services, and it is currently being expanded to the northern part of Belize where it will cover another 20% of the population.

Strengthening health systems based on a strong primary health care model is crucial to building back better and accelerating progress towards Universal Health Coverage and health security. Effective implementation of Primary Health Care-oriented health systems enables greater equity and resilience, with greater potential to deliver high-quality, safe, comprehensive, integrated, accessible, available, and affordable health care to everyone, everywhere, but most especially the most vulnerable.

As we aim to continue this movement and achieve greater health gains, it is imperative for us to work together with all stakeholders to reorient our health systems to primary health care as a resilient foundation for universal health coverage. Thank you!