



Statement of Ireland

77th session of the World Health Assembly

Item 11.1 Universal health coverage

27 May 2024

Honourable Chair,

Distinguished Delegates,

Ireland aligns with the statement delivered by Belgium on behalf of the European Union and its Member States.

Each country has a different path to achieving Universal Health Coverage, informed by the needs of their people and the financial, human, and knowledge-based resources available. However, while our journeys may be different we share a common destination: ensuring that everyone has access, without discrimination, to necessary and essential health services, and to safe, affordable and effective medicines and vaccines.

In securing this for our populations, we must also ensure that the use of health care services does not expose people to financial hardship, in particular for poor, and marginalized segments of the population.

Delivering universal health coverage remains one of the great ambitions that we are focused on achieving for the people of Ireland.

It is an ambition which contains at its centre, the promise of a better more equitable future, one in which every individual has access to the healthcare services they need regardless of their circumstances and ability to pay.

Ireland's health services are undergoing the most significant programme of reform and expansion in the history of the State, with fair and affordable healthcare as the cornerstone. Over the last 3 years we have delivered a range of measures to achieve this, and we are committed to continuing to deliver on that agenda.

The range of measures we have introduced, including reduced copayments for prescribed medicines, removal of acute hospital inpatient charges and expanded access to free GP care, are intended to ease the financial pressures being experienced by reducing the healthcare costs of patients and families.

To deliver on the collective goal of Universal Health Care, Member States need strong, efficient, and equitable health systems that are rooted in and support the communities they serve. Improving access to Primary healthcare services is the most effective and cost-efficient way to achieve this.

Ireland has made real progress in this area with significant investment in primary care services through a suite of strategic reform initiatives that seek to reduce dependency on the hospital system, with service delivery reoriented towards general practice, primary care, and community-based services. This has improved access to, and the affordability of, primary care services, delivering expanded eligibility and reducing the cost to patients.

Ireland believes that if Health Coverage is to be genuinely universal, it should be affordable, accessible and inclusive embracing all health services, including those related to Sexual and Reproductive Health as set out in the Sustainable Development Goals.

We have taken vital steps in Ireland to ensure that these services are available, of good quality, accessible to all women and girls throughout their lives, free of stigma, discrimination, coercion and violence.

This significant and sincere programme of reform reflects Ireland's commitment to our UN Sustainable Development Goals, notably those to "ensure healthy lives and promote well-being for all at all ages" (SDG 3) and to "reduce inequalities within and among countries" (SDG 10). Ireland is committed to these goals and to the full suite of UN Goals.

There is an urgent need for us to hasten progress if we are to meet our shared goal of health and well-being for all. Expanding Universal Health Coverage is critical to recover ground lost during the COVID-19 pandemic, to attain global health targets. Furthermore, as the proceedings of this meeting over recent days have clearly demonstrated Universal Health Coverage is now increasingly recognised as fundamental in terms of our capacity to prevent, prepare for and respond to future health threats.

Thank you.