

# Equitable access to medicines for Universal Health Coverage by 2030

UN Member States have agreed to try to achieve universal health coverage (UHC) by 2030, as part of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). UHC includes financial risk protection, access to quality essential health-care services, and access to safe, effective, quality and affordable essential medicines and vaccines for all. Other targets of SDG 3 for “Good health and well-being” also depend on providing access to medicines and vaccines.

This policy checklist is the first in a series to summarize key issues and important recommendations for expanding access to essential medicines and vaccines.

In the South-East Asia Region, at least 65 million people are impoverished because of out-of-pocket health spending, much of which is spent on medicines. Governments need to seek effective outcomes within a complex policy environment when expanding access to essential medicines and vaccines.

Other national development policies (international trade, innovation and research, intellectual property rights) can affect public health and access to medical products. These should not undermine the public health goals of expanding access and should work in synergy with medicines policies to promote pathways for universal access to essential medicines.

National pharmaceutical systems need to ensure equitable and timely access to safe, effective, quality medical products and related services, and promote their appropriate and cost-effective use.

To make significant progress by 2030, national pharmaceutical systems need to be further strengthened in the following key areas:

- ⦿ Policy, law and governance, and accountability
- ⦿ Innovation, research and development, manufacturing and trade
- ⦿ Financing; pricing, affordability
- ⦿ Quality assurance and regulation

## ✓ Checklist for national policy-makers

- ❑ National medicines policies regularly updated and well integrated with national health policies
- ❑ Other legislations and policies on trade, innovation, commerce and intellectual property work in synergy to support access to medicines
- ❑ Government and stakeholders’ commitments secured to implement national medicines policies
- ❑ Regular strategic and operational planning process, setting clear, time-bound activities and targets with measurable indicators for implementation of national medicines policies
- ❑ Sustainable financing for procurement of essential medicines, vaccines and medical products, and related support services
- ❑ Appropriately skilled staff for medicines and medical product management, including appropriate and cost-effective use
- ❑ Information systems to support decision-making and monitoring of progress with reliable and timely data
- ❑ Adherence to ethical standards to promote transparency and accountability
- ❑ Regular evaluations to measure what works and policy innovation to meet changing national needs
- ❑ Global, regional and intercountry partnerships and collaboration to enhance national capacities.

- ⦿ Procurement and supply management
- ⦿ Appropriate and responsible use
- ⦿ Pharmaceutical workforce
- ⦿ Information and monitoring.

These UHC technical briefs summarize current knowledge on strengthening health systems to achieve Universal Health Coverage. They outline key technical issues and international experience relevant to health policy and practice in low- and middle-income countries in the South-East Asia Region.

## Guiding principles of the essential medicines concept to improve access

- Common health problems for the majority of the population can be prevented, treated and managed with a defined number of carefully selected essential medicines chosen for their effectiveness, safety, cost-effectiveness and affordability.
- Procurement and supply management systems are most efficient when they handle a limited number of products.
- Quality assurance and regulatory control are more effective when a limited number of products needs regular monitoring in the supply chain.
- Health professionals can be trained at different levels of the health-care system to appropriately prescribe a limited number of products, based on evidence-informed guidelines.
- Patients can be better informed about the effective use of selected medicines by health professionals.

## Improving access to essential medicines – a framework for national action

### Sustainable financing

- Secure sufficient public funding for the provision of essential medicines and vaccines.
- Include essential medicines in benefit packages provided by the public sector or health insurance schemes.
- Reduce out-of-pocket spending, especially catastrophic expenditure on medicines.
- Utilize external funding for priority diseases with high public health impact when domestic financing is limited.
- Explore innovative financing mechanisms.
- Track expenditure on medicines for key populations.

### Reliable supply of quality products

- Assure quality through effective regulatory controls.
- Increase regulatory collaboration via the South-East Asia Regulatory Network (SEARN).
- Enhance regulatory convergence and reliance mechanisms to leverage available regional regulatory capacities.
- Develop strategic procurement systems to improve efficiency, e.g. pooling and regional collaboration to use monopsony power.
- Develop and maintain comprehensive electronic information systems to support procurement and distribution.
- Focus on enhancing last-mile delivery systems to ensure physical accessibility to patients

### Affordability and availability

- Routinely monitor prices and availability to increase price transparency through cross-national comparisons.
- Implement a generics policy to enhance price competition.
- Negotiate equitable pricing for high-cost, innovative essential medicines.
- Interpret WTO/TRIPS flexibilities to provide access to affordable products, where applicable.
- Use comprehensive pricing interventions to reduce prices, e.g. control distribution chain mark-ups, remove import or sales taxes, use international reference pricing.
- Encourage local production when appropriate, cost effective and feasible.

### Appropriate and responsible use

- Develop national treatment guidelines based on the best available evidence concerning efficacy, safety, quality and cost-effectiveness.
- Actively implement national treatment guidelines, and provide support and the right incentives for adherence by prescribers.
- Regularly update the national list of essential medicines, based on national treatment guidelines.
- Regularly monitor the use of medicines and implement multipronged interventions to correct inappropriate use.
- Use a national list of essential medicines and treatment guidelines to train and supervise health professionals.