



Inter-Parliamentary Union

For democracy. For everyone.

Virtual workshop

Universal health coverage and equity: Always hand in hand?

26 October 2021

14:00 – 15:30 CEST (Geneva)

Concept note

Background

Health equity is achieved when everyone can attain their full potential for health and well-being. It is determined by social norms as well as political, legal and other structural determinants. Universal health coverage (UHC) aims to ensure everybody has access to the health services they need without suffering financial hardship. Although equity is a guiding principle of UHC, it is not automatically achieved with the implementation of UHC policies and strategies. Inequalities can be observed at different levels, such as in the availability and coverage of health services or in financial protection, and can be linked to socio-economic, geographic, gender or other types of disparities.

For countries to make progress towards UHC in a way that realizes the right to health it is crucial to identify inequalities and address their root causes. Collecting, analyzing and reporting disaggregated data is an important step to understand barriers to health services and inequitable health outcomes. Parliamentarians can further complement data by engaging communities and local stakeholders to assess the impact of existing laws and policies. Such evidence should inform a clear definition of equity in UHC policies, the design of concrete strategies to ensure UHC contributes to improving health equity, the prioritization of budgetary allocations, as well as the passing or amendment of relevant legislative provisions to back UHC and equity objectives.

In 2019, the IPU Member Parliaments adopted the landmark resolution “[Achieving universal health coverage by 2030: The role of parliaments in realizing the right to health](#)”. The resolution underlines the need for a systemic approach to equity and calls for priority to be given to the availability and accessibility of health-care services for vulnerable groups. In the framework of follow-up to the implementation of the resolution, previous virtual meetings were organized by the IPU on priority areas for parliamentary action. As part of these efforts, the report “[Parliamentary action on universal health coverage in times of COVID-19](#)” was published in February 2021. It reveals new barriers in access to health for vulnerable and marginalized populations due to the COVID-19 pandemic, as well as challenges in ensuring health equity including in countries with established health systems. Among the areas identified for further follow-up, the report recommends focusing on parliamentary action on UHC for marginalized, vulnerable and key population groups with an emphasis on the principle of health equity, as well as on UHC setbacks associated with the pandemic and parliamentary programmes to reverse them.

Content and objectives

The IPU is organizing a global virtual workshop to discuss what the equity principle means in practice for country efforts towards UHC and how parliaments can integrate equity considerations in debates and action on UHC.

The specific objectives of the webinar are to:

- Build understanding of the linkages between UHC and equity and how parliaments can pursue equity objectives.
- Promote inter-parliamentary exchanges on concrete strategies to improve health equity through UHC and emerging challenges in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic.
- Launch the IPU brief: "[A Winnable Battle: Parliamentarians and universal health coverage](#)".
- In follow up to the 2019 resolution on UHC, build accountability for the implementation of the resolution by parliaments and collect information on country efforts to inform the global parliamentary community.
- Identify specific needs and areas in which parliaments require further support to move towards UHC.

Target audience

The workshop is open to all parliaments. The target audience includes:

- Parliamentarians members of health committees and other committees dealing with health matters
- Parliamentary staff supporting parliamentary work on health

The workshop will also be open to other interested parliamentarians and parliamentary staff and include the IPU Advisory Group on Health members and its technical partners.

The workshop will take place on the Zoom platform. The languages will be English, French and Spanish (simultaneous interpretation).

Process of follow up to the IPU resolution on UHC

The virtual workshop is part of the process to follow up to the IPU resolution on UHC and will help inform future IPU activities to strengthen parliamentary engagement on UHC, as well as the provision of support to national parliaments in the area of UHC.

The parliamentary practices and challenges shared during the workshop will feed into an annual summary of the IPU Advisory Group on Health where it will take stock of different national experiences and identify lessons learnt and gaps in the implementation of the IPU resolution on UHC.

Provisional programme

Opening

14:00 – 14:09 CEST Welcome and presentation of the IPU brief: “A Winnable Battle: Parliamentarians and universal health coverage”

Session 1: Equity considerations in advancing UHC

14:10 – 14:24 In conversation with an expert

14:25 – 14: 45 Q&A session

Session 2: What strategies are countries implementing to improve health equity through UHC?

14:46 – 14:54 Country presentation

14:54 – 15:25 Interactive discussion with all participants:

- Has your parliament implemented any steps to monitor and analyse inequalities in the context of UHC strategies and policies?
- What legislative or budgetary measures has your parliament taken to target vulnerable and marginalized groups as part of efforts to achieve UHC?
- How is the COVID-19 pandemic affecting health equity in your countries? Has your parliament taken any remedial action?

Closing

15:26 Closing remarks