

Delivering quality health services

A global imperative for universal health coverage



Delivering quality health services: a global imperative for universal health coverage

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Preface

The Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) reaffirm a global commitment to achieve universal health coverage (UHC) by 2030. This means that all people and communities, everywhere in the world, should have access to the high-quality health services they need – promotive, preventive, curative, rehabilitative, or palliative – without facing financial hardship.

The way we typically measure progress in UHC is through effective coverage of essential health services and financial protection (ensuring that no one becomes impoverished because of ill-health). But even if the world achieved essential health coverage and financial protection, health outcomes would still be poor if services were low-quality and unsafe. Delivering quality health services is essential to UHC. That is the focus of this report.

Evidence suggests that substandard care wastes significant resources and harms the health of populations, destroying human capital and reducing productivity. Quality of care, especially patient safety, is essential to creating trust in health services. It is also key to global health security, which starts with local health security, and in turn depends on high-quality frontline health services. Quality health services not only prevent human suffering and ensure healthier societies, they also ensure better human capital and healthier economies.

Too often, quality is perceived as a luxury that only rich countries can afford. This is a fallacy. Building quality health services requires a culture of transparency, engagement, and openness about results, which are possible in all societies – regardless of their income level. Around the world, lessons abound on what works and what does not, providing a rich foundation from which to rapidly scale up a quality revolution. Technological innovation plays a key role in offering new ways to expand high-quality health care services more rapidly, and at an affordable cost.

A focus on people-centredness has to be the core of quality. People and communities must be engaged in the design, delivery, and ongoing assessment of health services to ensure they are built to meet local health needs – rather than those of donors, commercial or political interests, or because “it’s always been done that way”. Focusing on quality is critical, but leadership must also focus on celebrating excellence; communicating transparently; and fostering collaboration across clinical teams, as well as with patients, and civil society – including patient groups, nongovernmental organizations, and grassroots community groups.

Universal health coverage is not a dream for the future. It is already a reality in many countries; however, without quality health services, it can remain an empty promise. This foundational report builds a strong technical and political case for investing in quality health services. The collective prize is a healthier, safer and fairer world.

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