

Engaging Policymakers to Achieve Universal Health Coverage

For more than 70 years, the movement to achieve **Universal Health Coverage** (UHC) has been about advancing the fundamental human right every person has to a healthy and productive life. The realization of UHC in Uganda will ensure all people and communities have access to essential primary health care services, including high-quality promotive, preventive, curative, rehabilitative, and palliative services where and when they need them and without suffering financial hardship. We believe no one should choose between health care or basic life necessities.

UHC is key to meeting the United Nation's **Sustainable Development Goals** (SDGs), including **Goal 3**, "Ensure healthy lives and promote wellbeing for all at all ages," which is of major importance to Uganda as the country continues to drive progress toward UHC. The recent mid-term review of the **Health Sector Development Plan 2015-2020** showed advancement toward total coverage using key interventions, including adequate financing for the provision of health services and reducing reliance on direct, out-of-pocket payments for care. However, even with these advancements, work remains to achieve UHC and meet both the SDGs and Uganda's **Vision 2040**—the goal of transforming Uganda from a predominantly peasant and low-income country to a competitive, upper middle-income country. While physical access to health services is decent, widespread, effective access remains a challenge. According to Dr. Sarah Byakika, the Commissioner of Planning at the Ugandan Ministry of Health, the **2015 global assessment data profile** found fewer than 50 percent of Ugandans had access to adequate primary health services.

Benefits of UHC

UHC has the potential to unleash major health and economic benefits across a country. Access to affordable, high-quality services leads to better health outcomes for everyone, including the most vulnerable populations. A healthy population is more educated, more productive, and can more meaningfully contribute to a country's society and economy. Additionally, UHC protects families against poverty-causing health costs. Without the risk of high health costs, families can spend money on other things, boosting the economy.



Zaina, a Living Goods-supported community health worker in Iganga, Uganda performs a rapid malaria test on a sick child. Community-based primary health care has the potential for significantly accelerating health care for all.

UHC is also associated with various political benefits. Leaders who have led UHC processes have derived substantial political benefits in elections and approval ratings. When financed and implemented sustainably, UHC reforms have won sizeable votes in countries across Africa, Asia, Europe, South America, and North America over the past 70 years.

UHC Day 2018 Meeting

Most importantly, alignment and collaboration across sectors and stakeholders is vital to realize UHC. Recognizing the importance of diverse engagement, the Ugandan Ministry of Health and partners organized a high-level breakfast meeting on UHC Day, December 12th, 2018, with the theme, Multisectoral Engagements towards Universal Health Coverage: the Role of Parliamentarians. The meeting was attended by parliamentarians, the National Population Council, and the Ministry of Finance, Planning, and Economic Development. In addition, multilateral and civil society partners included WHO, Living Goods, PATH, Financing Alliance for Health, Amref Health Africa, SPEED, Makerere School of Public Health, and members of the media.

The aim of the meeting was to enhance the capacity of policymakers to effectively advocate for multi-sectoral engagement to achieve UHC. Participants examined the current state of UHC in Uganda and stressed that health system improvements are key to eradicating poverty and preventable disease. Efforts to implement an official country roadmap for UHC as well as to formally establish the role of parliamentarians in achieving these goals were also shared. The meeting leveraged influential voices—from policymakers to community health champions—voicing their ideas for current and future plans to bring health to all Ugandans.

The Way Forward

As a result of the meeting, the Ministry of Health constituted a multi-sectoral taskforce to develop the first roadmap for UHC in Uganda. The **Uganda UHC Roadmap** will outline inclusive steps for the country to take to achieve UHC by 2040. Additionally, the Ministry of Health also committed to establishing a health-sector development plan with the aim of accelerating movement towards UHC, highlighting the essential health-related services needed for the promotion of a healthy and productive life. Finally, the government also committed to engaging parliamentarians to ensure UHC remains a critical component as they increase oversight, budget appropriations, and accountability. Along with the Uganda UHC Roadmap, these commitments will ensure all Ugandans receive high-quality care without financial hardship.

Voices from the meeting

UHC is right, smart, and overdue... [The] government has all that to gain when they prioritize health as a human right. Let's work together to make this work.

Dr. Michael Bukenya, Chairperson of the Health Committee of Parliament

There is an urgent need for a strong, collective commitment to effectively and successfully implement UHC and stressed the need for Ugandan Parliamentarians to prioritize UHC as a key advocacy issue. We still have a long way to go and this calls for all actors to join hands to achieve UHC.

Dr. Sarah Byakika, Commissioner of Planning, Ugandan Ministry of Health

Moving toward UHC requires strengthening health systems in all countries. Robust financing structures are key. When people have to pay for health services out of their own pockets, the poor are often unable to obtain many of the services they need, and even the rich may be exposed to financial hardship in the event of severe or long-term illness. Primary health care, including community health, is the most efficient and cost effective way to achieve universal health coverage around the world.

Emilie Chambert, Country Director, Living Goods

Achieving UHC in Uganda is dependent on generating political will to promote sufficient, sustainable, and equitable investment in health and the social determinants of health. Members of parliament have to champion this cause. Other sectors responsible for enabling and boosting relevant health-issue areas are equally important.

Dr. Fatunmbi Bayo, WHO Representative

There is need for stakeholders to facilitate monitoring and accountability to ensure all sectors contribute to health. There is also the need to protect the poor and vulnerable in the health sector, so no one in Uganda is left behind.

Brian Atuhaire, Health Financing Policy Advocate, PATH

About Living Goods

Living Goods is a non-profit organization that seeks to drive lasting impact in community health through innovative approaches delivered in partnership with government. By leveraging cutting-edge technology and innovative approaches to transform the delivery of community health, Living Goods works to save and improve lives, particularly for mothers and for children under the age of five years. We partner with governments at different levels to transform access to essential healthcare by supporting the delivery of effective community health programs. Our approaches leverage the power of mHealth technology, including data-driven performance management, and motivated and compensated community health workers, to bridge critical healthcare gaps around some of the most easily treatable yet potentially deadly health issues for mothers and children including malaria, diarrhea, pneumonia, pregnancy and new-born care, family planning, undernutrition and immunization counseling. Since 2007, more than 8,700 Living Goods-supported community health workers in our counties of operation have reached nearly 7 million people with life-saving healthcare.

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