


Chapter 2

Universal Health Coverage:


Progress Toward Achieving Universal Health Coverage and Lessons Learned

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ABSTRACT

Universal Health Coverage (UHC) aims to ensure that all individuals have access to essential healthcare services without financial hardship. While significant progress has been made globally, challenges such as funding gaps, healthcare disparities, and infrastructure limitations hinder its full implementation. The objective of this chapter is to analyze the progress, challenges, and lessons learned in achieving UHC while proposing strategies for overcoming existing barriers. To achieve this, a comprehensive approach was adopted, including a review of policy frameworks,

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quantitative analysis of healthcare access metrics, and case studies from countries with successful UHC models. This chapter contributes by providing a comparative analysis of UHC implementation across different healthcare systems, identifying effective policy interventions, and recommending scalable strategies for overcoming financial and infrastructural barriers. This also integrates real-world case studies and quantitative evaluations to offer actionable insights.

INTRODUCTION

Definition and Concept of Universal Health Coverage (UHC)

Universal Health Coverage (UHC) is a foundational principle of global health equity. It ensures all individuals and communities receive the health services they need, ranging from health promotion to prevention, treatment, rehabilitation, and palliative care, without suffering financial hardship. The concept is deeply rooted in the human right to health and serves as a key objective in achieving sustainable development goals (World Health Organization, 2022a). UHC does not imply free healthcare for all, but rather equitable access to essential, high-quality services that are financially accessible and provided through a well-functioning health system.

Globally, UHC has gained traction as a guiding framework for health system reforms. It requires robust health financing mechanisms that promote risk pooling and prepayment, while minimizing out-of-pocket expenses that disproportionately affect vulnerable populations (Ifeagwu et al., 2021). Importantly, the COVID-19 pandemic underscored systemic inequities and reignited the global urgency to invest in resilient health systems that can withstand shocks while maintaining core services (Verguet et al., 2021).

Efforts toward UHC must also address the broader determinants of health and ensure inclusivity across regions, particularly in low- and middle-income countries where access gaps are more pronounced. Oral health, mental health, and non-communicable diseases, often overlooked, must be fully integrated into UHC agendas (World Health Organization, 2022b). Ultimately, UHC is not just about coverage, it is about care that is available, affordable, and acceptable to all, irrespective of socioeconomic status, geography, or background.

Historical Evolution of UHC

The journey of Universal Health Coverage (UHC) is one of progressive realization, rooted in human rights, shaped by global crises, and driven by shifting public expectations. Its origins trace back to the post-World War II era, when the devastating

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