**BRIEFING PAPER**

**Committee: Health**

**Question of: Universal Healthcare**

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Summary

Universal healthcare is a system where every citizen or resident of a country is guaranteed access to essential services, regardless of their financial background. It aims to ensure health equity and improve public health outcomes. To deliver on this promise, countries need to have strong, efficient and equitable health systems that are rooted in the communities they serve [1]. This will look different for every countries, as factors such as education, economic stability and population size play a big role in whether or not a healthcare system will be successful. However, universal healthcare systems face many issues when being implemented, such as the cost, efficiency and sustainability, making it a resource-intensive, difficult to achieve system.

Definitions of Key Terms

Universal healthcare – where all people have access to the full range of quality health services they need, when and where they need them, without financial hardship [1].

Single-payer system – a healthcare system in which the government finances healthcare services through taxation

Health equity – the principle of ensuring fair access to healthcare services, irrespective of economic, social or demographic factors

Out-of-pocket expenditure – direct payments made by individuals for healthcare services not covered by insurance or public programs

Social Health Insurance (SHI) – healthcare funded through mandatory contributions from employers, employees and governments, managed by public or private insures

Primary healthcare – community-based healthcare services focused on prevention, treatment and health promotion

Background Information

The increasing recognition of health as a fundamental human right has lead to the concept of universal healthcare. Its adoption varies, from fully government-funded systems in some nations to mixed public-private models in others. Covid made visible that people’s health is directly linked to their wealth, and that nations were providing ‘sticking plaster’ approaches for healthcare that did not solve the issue [3].

Major Countries and Organisations Involved

The World Health Organisation (WHO) is a specialised UN agency responsible for global public health, and are working towards equitable access to healthcare for every citizen.

Many HICs such as the UK, Canada and Nordic nations already have universal systems with varying levels of governmental involvement e.g.

* the NHS in the UK offers free healthcare funded though taxation
* the Canada Health act uses provincial systems to provide universal health coverage
* Australia have a universal public health insurance program known as Medicare

In other nations such as the US, the lack of universal healthcare causes great financial burden on citizens when struggling to pay for health insurance, causing disparities in healthcare.

Timeline of Events

1948: WHO declared health as a fundamental human right

1948-1949: the creation of universal healthcare systems in the UK and Nordic nations

2000: UN Millennium Development Goals highlight health access issues

2015: Universal healthcare coverage was included in the UN Sustainable Development Goals (target 3) [2]

2020-2022: COVID-19 pandemic underscores the need for universal healthcare

Relevant UN Treaties and Events

Universal Declaration of Human Rights (1948): Article 25 emphasises the right to healthcare

International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (ICESCR, 1966): Commits states to progressive realisation of healthcare access

Sustainable Development Goals (2015): Target 3.8 focuses on achieving universal health coverage [2]

Previous Attempts to Solve the Issue

Germany Bismarck Model (1883) – the introduction of the world’s first national health insurance system, funded through employer and employee contributions [4]

US Progressive Movement (1910s) – early proposals for national health insurance begins [5]

UK National Health Service (1948) – post WWII led to the establishment on the NHS, providing universal coverage funded though taxation [6]

WHO World Health Assembly – “Health for All by the year 2000”

Possible Solutions

Integrated health systems – combining public and private efforts to ensure efficient services

International support – increased aid and expertise from the UN/HICs for LICs

Investment into technological innovations – to develop technology such as telemedicine and digital health tools which can help expand the reach of healthcare services and reduce the long-term cost

Employer healthcare mandates – require employers to provide insurance to their employees

Community-based insurance – develop local, cooperative health coverage schemes

Preventative focus – prioritise prevention by investing into research and education

Bibliography

[1] WHO. (n.d.). *Universal Health Coverage*. World Health Organization (WHO). <https://www.who.int/health-topics/universal-health-coverage#tab=tab_1>

[2] UN. (2023). *SDG Indicators.* UNSD – Welcome to UNSD. <https://unstats.un.org/sdgs/report/2023/>

[3] *Universal Healthcare*. (n.d.). London South Bank University. <https://www.lsbu.ac.uk/our-schools/institute-of-health-and-social-care/business-and-enterprise/collaborations-and-partnerships/universal-healthcare>

[4] Mossialos, E., Wenzl, M., Osborn, R., & Anderson, C. (2002). *International Profiles of Health Care Systems*. <https://www.commonwealthfund.org/sites/default/files/2020-12/International_Profiles_of_Health_Care_Systems_Dec2020.pdf>

[5] Starr, P. (1982). *The Social Transformation of American Medicine*. Basic Books.

[6] Rivett, G. (1998). *From Cradle to Grave: Fifty Years of the NHS*.

[7] WHO. (1978). *Primary Health Care: Report of the International Conference on Primary Health Care*. World Health Organisation. <https://www.who.int/publications/i/item/9241800011>

Useful Links for Further Research

<https://www.who.int/health-topics/universal-health-coverage>

<https://www.worldbank.org/en/topic/universalhealthcoverage>

<https://www.commonwealthfund.org/international-health-policy-center/system-features/how-does-universal-health-coverage-work>