

CONCEPT NOTE

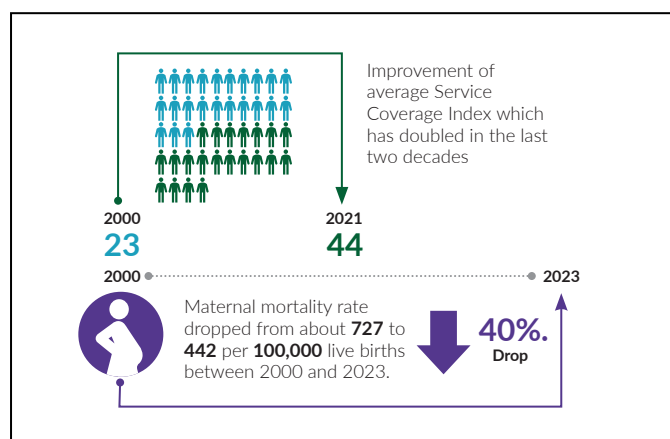
Access for All: Scaling Comprehensive Quality Healthcare Services Across Africa

Background

The Commitment to UHC and Achieved Progress

The global commitment to Universal Health Coverage (UHC) is a pledge to ensure that every individual, everywhere, can access the full spectrum of quality health services they need, when they need them, without facing financial hardship. UHC covers the entire continuum of care, from health promotion and disease prevention to treatment, rehabilitation, and palliative support. At its core, it safeguards not only health but also the dignity and well-being of individuals across every stage of life. ^[1]

Africa has made commendable progress toward this vision. According to the World Health Organization (WHO), the average Service Coverage Index has improved from 23 in 2000 to 44 in 2021, a near doubling in two decades. ^[2] For instance, maternal mortality rate dropped from about 727 to 442 per 100,000 live births between 2000 and 2023, a decline of about 40%. ^[3] Under-five mortality rate in the region also declined by about 58% between 1990 and 2017, but still over half of the world's 5.4 million under-five deaths in 2017 occurred in Africa. ^[4]



Age-standardized mortality rates (ASMR) due to non-communicable diseases (NCDs) in the WHO African region declined by approximately 18% between 2000 and 2019. ^[5] Across decades, many communicable causes have seen large declines in mortality and DALYs, attributed to vaccines, treatments, and better coverage. HIV-related deaths dropped by more than 55%. ^[6] Additionally, several countries have expanded investments in primary care. Yet, with just a few years left until 2030, Africa remains only midway toward achieving full-service coverage, far behind the global average of 68. This underscores the urgency for accelerated action and investment to close the gap. ^[2]

Challenges Limiting Progress to UHC

The delivery of comprehensive, high-quality healthcare depends on resilient systems powered by critical success factors: a skilled, equipped, and motivated health workforce; reliable infrastructure; innovative service delivery; and sustainable

financing. Unfortunately, many African health systems still grapple with persistent and systemic challenges.



Financing gaps: Of all the 47 countries in the WHO Africa region, only eight on average, met the recommended threshold of spending a minimum of US\$249 per capita on health between 2012 and 2020. This ranges from US\$16 to US\$236, highlighting significant disparities across the region. The out-of-pocket (OOP) accounted for an average of 36% of current health expenditure from 2012 to 2020. ^[7] Over 200 million people in Africa are burdened by high OOP spending, and about 150 million are pushed into or deeper into poverty due to health spending. ^[8]



Infrastructure and service quality: In lower and lower-middle-income countries in Africa, only 40% of health facilities have reliable electricity, 15% lack any access to electricity, and 70% lack basic diagnostic capacity. ^[9] Outdated infrastructure, fragmented service delivery, weak governance, and cultural barriers further undermine progress.



Health workforce shortages: Africa has just 1.5 health workers (physicians, nurses, midwives) per 1,000 people, well below the WHO threshold of 4.45 needed to deliver essential services. ^[10] Shortages are most severe in rural and marginalized areas.

Innovations and Opportunities to Scale

Despite these challenges, Africa is also home to groundbreaking innovations that demonstrate the potential for UHC when backed by strong leadership and adequate financing. At the 2025 Symposium, several groundbreaking innovations from across Africa were showcased, each aimed at expanding access to quality healthcare services. Highlights included Nigeria's transformation of tertiary health institutions into centers of excellence, Egypt's establishment of a unified system to advance health and equity, Shefaa Al Orman's model of delivering comprehensive, free cancer care to the most vulnerable, and Nigeria's Community Health Watch Initiative, which strengthens community-level accountability and service delivery. Beyond these models, digital solutions such as telemedicine, integrated electronic health records, and AI-enabled diagnostics are bridging service delivery gaps and improving efficiency at scale.

Expanding universal health insurance through sustainable domestic financing, while deliberately prioritizing underserved populations, can unlock wider and more equitable access to essential services. To ensure long-term sustainability, strong regulation and accountability mechanisms must safeguard resources and maintain public trust. The success of UHC will not be defined by coverage figures alone, but by the tangible value, equity, and effectiveness of the care delivered to every individual.

Session Objectives

This session will bring together government and policy leaders, private sector partners, development finance institutions, global health partners, civil society, and the research and academic community to engage in discussions that deepen insights and chart opportunities for scaling comprehensive quality healthcare services across Africa.

Focus areas will include:

- **Examining proven UHC models and showcasing innovative service delivery** approaches from across Africa and beyond that integrate preventive and specialized care, demonstrating not only health impact but also sustainable business models and investable opportunities.
- **Highlighting opportunities for scale** and identifying where successful pilots and country-led reforms can be expanded, positioning integrated service delivery approaches, insurance innovations, and community-driven models as scalable platforms that attract private capital while strengthening equity and continuity of care.
- **Strengthening health workforce strategies and exploring investable solutions** for workforce training, retention, and equitable deployment, highlighting opportunities for private sector partnerships in education, workforce platforms, and performance-linked incentive models.
- **Exploring financing innovations** and assessing blended finance structures, outcome-based models, and public-private partnerships that de-risk investment in service delivery while creating predictable returns and long-term system sustainability.
- **Promoting equity and inclusion** and demonstrating how reaching underserved, rural, and marginalized populations is not only a social imperative but also an untapped growth market, where innovative service models can expand coverage, reduce inefficiencies, and generate measurable social and financial returns.

Expected Outcomes

- » **A consolidated repository of scalable UHC models** that demonstrate measurable health and economic impact, adaptable to different African contexts.
- » **Action-oriented investment cases highlighting opportunities** for funders and governments to back impactful, sustainable health interventions.
- » **Commitments to strengthen health workforce systems** — including new frameworks for training, task-shifting, and equitable distribution.
- » **Innovative financing roadmaps** that reduce out-of-pocket spending, expand insurance coverage, and mobilize domestic and private resources.
- » **Agreed strategies to advance equity** and reach underserved populations, ensuring UHC expansion translates into inclusive growth and resilience.

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