

# Universal health coverage (UHC) and older people

## High-Level Meeting on UHC

On 23 September, heads of state will attend the UN High-Level Meeting on Universal Health Coverage (UHC) in New York to agree a political declaration that will set out governments' responsibilities for providing universal access to affordable and quality health services for all. **We're calling on heads of state to attend the meeting, to commit to the implementation of UHC following the High-Level Meeting and to support the inclusion of older people in efforts to achieve it.**

## About UHC

UHC is essential for ensuring all people, everywhere, can access quality health and care services with financial protection. Affordable, accessible, quality health and care services unlock people's potential. UHC is therefore one of the smartest investments countries can make. Nearly all countries, including low-income countries, have the capacity to mobilise the resources required to achieve UHC.

However, progress on UHC efforts for older people remains unequal and limited. Current efforts fail to address the specific barriers older women and men face in accessing health and care services, and to protect them from financial hardship. These barriers include the cost of essential medicines, lack of transport, inadequate health provider skills and age discrimination<sup>1</sup>.

**UHC must be fit for an ageing world.** By 2020 more than 1 billion people will be aged 60 and over. UHC presents a critical opportunity to re-orient health and care systems to meet the needs of increasing numbers of older people with a higher prevalence of chronic conditions and complex health and care needs.

## Final draft of the Political Declaration

HelpAge welcomes the Political Declaration of the High-Level Meeting on Universal Health Coverage, "Universal Health Coverage: Moving Together to Build a Healthier world". We welcome the UN Member States' recognition that older people should not be left behind, by highlighting that **"many health systems are not sufficiently prepared to respond to the needs of a rapidly ageing population,"** and committing to **"Scale up efforts to promote healthy and active ageing, maintain and improve quality of life of older persons and to respond to the needs of the rapidly ageing population, especially the need for promotive, preventive, curative, rehabilitative and palliative care as well as specialized care and the sustainable provision of long-term care, taking into account national contexts and priorities."**

We also welcome the Political Declaration's strong focus on universality alongside recognition of the need for **integrated, holistic and people-centred** health and care services; **financial risk protection for all throughout the life course**; access to **assistive products**; and the commitment to building a **competent health**

---

<sup>1</sup> Global AgeWatch Insights, 2018, <http://globalagewatch.org/global-agewatch/reports/global-agewatch-insights-2018-report-summary-and-country-profiles/>

**workforce.** In order to achieve the ambitions of the Political Declaration, older people's needs must be properly met within UHC, so Heads of State must also ensure that:

- 'Life-course' approaches are understood as being inclusive of "all people at all ages" as stated in SDG 3.
- Upper age-caps which limit data capture on the health and care needs of older people are removed.
- The inter-linkages of older age, gender and disability are recognised and responded to.

## **Making UHC a Reality for Older People**

Moving beyond the High-Level Meeting, HelpAge is committed to ensuring the Political Declaration and the momentum generated by the High-Level Meeting delivers greater attention to the health and care needs of older people. We will continue to work with HelpAge partners and network members going forward to urge governments to:

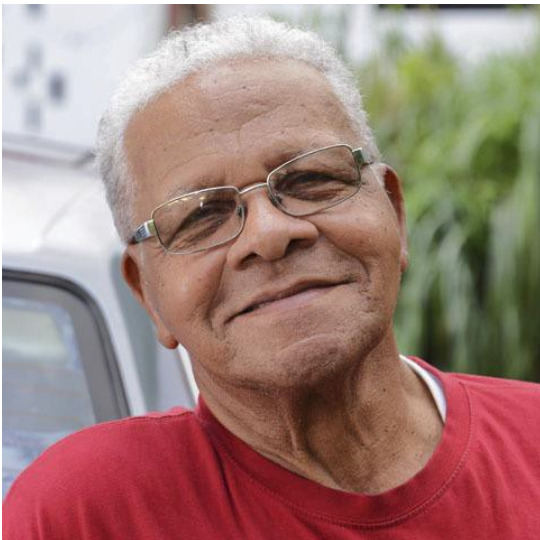
- Implement Universal Health Coverage ensuring that older people and their health and care needs are properly included within it.
- Increase domestic spending on health so that a comprehensive package of health and care services can be provided that adequately responds to the needs of a rapidly ageing population.
- Invest in age-inclusive UHC and the building blocks needed to deliver this, including:
  - Service delivery that is person-centred and not focused on single diseases in isolation
  - Health workforces that have the skills to respond to the needs of ageing populations
  - Health information systems that are not age-capped
  - Access to essential medicines for conditions common in old age
  - Services free at point of access for people of all ages
  - The right to health incorporated in national law with ageing and older people's health and care needs explicitly included in national health policies
- Make gender equity a central pillar of UHC, recognising the unequal burden faced by women in accessing and providing health care, including the unpaid health and social care often provided by women.



© Malik Alymkulov/HelpAge International

“I spend most of my pension on the medication I need. I am lucky to have children who support me but others have to choose between buying food, having the gas or electricity at home or buying medicine”.

Midiakan, Kyrgyzstan



© HelpAge International

“Some of us have done a lot for society and yet we are not getting anything back. Instead, we are abused at health centres and some of the doctors don’t give us the service they should. We need better quality healthcare all round, both the medication and the service”.

Glandford, Jamaica.



© HelpAge International

“The hospitals say ‘We have no pill to treat old age’. We are not made to feel welcome. They are impatient with us”.

Nora, South Africa.

**HelpAge International is a global network of organisations promoting the right of all older people to lead dignified, healthy and secure lives.**