

POLICY STATEMENT ON UNIVERSAL HEALTH COVERAGE



Endorsed:

Date:

The World Health Organisation (WHO) defines Universal Health Coverage (UHC) as: ‘all people having access to the full range of quality health services they need, when and where they need them, without financial hardship’.¹ The ‘full range’ includes access, without discrimination, to promotive, preventive, curative, rehabilitative, and palliative essential health services.

The Sustainable Development Goals (SDG) endorsed by countries in 2015, included SDG 3 *Ensure healthy lives and promote well-being for all at all ages*. SDG target 3.8 on UHC aims to: *Achieve universal health coverage, including financial risk protection, access to quality essential healthcare services, and access to safe, effective, quality and affordable essential medicines and vaccines for all*.

The United Nations General Assembly at their high level meeting on universal health coverage in October 2023, reaffirmed the right of every human being, without distinction of any kind, to the enjoyment of the highest attainable standard of physical and mental health, and renewed their political commitment to achieving UHC.² The high level meeting noted that:

- Achieving UHC was fundamental to achieving the SDGs;
- Recognised the fundamental role of primary health care in achieving UHC;
- Recognised the importance of community based services as a critical component of primary health care and as a means of ensuring universal and equitable access to health for all;
- Expressed deep concern at the continued global shortfall of health workers.

The High Level meeting also recognised the role of Governments in strengthening “legislative and regulatory frameworks and institutions to support equitable access to quality service delivery” for the achievement of universal health coverage, including their role in the public financing of health systems and the development and implementation of policies toward “adequate, sustainable, effective and efficient health financing and investments in universal health coverage and health systems strengthening”.

¹ World Health Organisation Fact Sheet: Universal Health Coverage available from [https://www.who.int/news-room/fact-sheets/detail/universal-health-coverage-\(uhc\)](https://www.who.int/news-room/fact-sheets/detail/universal-health-coverage-(uhc))

² UN General Assembly 5 October 2023 Political declaration of the high level meeting on universal health coverage 78/4 available from <https://documents.un.org/doc/undoc/gen/n23/306/84/pdf/n2330684.pdf>

The Commonwealth Nurses and Midwives Federation (CNMF), recognising that the aim of UHC is ‘to leave no-one behind’, strongly supports initiatives to achieve universal health coverage in all Commonwealth countries that provides equitable access to the full range of quality health services needed by individuals, families, groups and communities when and where they need them, without financial hardship.

The CNMF also recognises that there are many factors that affect an individual’s health, such as: clean air; safe drinking water; sanitation; safe, sufficient and nutritious food; secure shelter; access to education; their genetic inheritance; the geographic and economic environment in which they live; and other external factors such as: natural disasters; extreme weather events; internal and external conflicts. For UHC to be truly universal and to meet the health needs of all, a whole of Government approach is essential.

UHC, if implemented in accordance with the principles outlined in the political declaration of the UN High Level meeting can not only contribute to the health and wellbeing of individuals, families, groups and communities, but can also help to “alleviate poverty; promote equitable access to quality education; achieve gender equality; empower women and girls; promote sustained, inclusive and sustainable economic growth and decent work for all; and reduce inequalities within and among countries”.

Nurses and midwives are central to progress toward UHC. Health care cannot be delivered without a health workforce. Together, nurses and midwives make up more than 50% of the global health workforce. Investment in the nursing and midwifery professions is critical to building effective and resilient health systems. The WHO estimates however, that by 2030, there will be a worldwide shortage of 4.5 million nurses and 0.31 million midwives. The distribution of nurses around the world is also highly uneven, with more than 80% of the world’s nursing workforce based in countries that are home to only half of the world’s population.³

The CNMF encourages all nurses, midwives, and nursing and midwives professional and industrial associations to be fully informed about, and involved in, national plans for the development and implementation of universal health coverage in their countries including –

- What services are being included in essential health care packages - that they are comprehensive and will meet the health needs of all individuals, families, groups and communities across their lifespan, especially those who have specific physical, mental or emotional needs, or who are marginalised in society, or hard to reach;
- That essential health care packages include promotive, preventive, curative, rehabilitative and palliative services;
- That the major focus of UHC national health plans and policies are based on a primary health care approach with an emphasis on community based health services;
- That a wide range of health service users and providers, including nurses and midwives, are involved in the nationally developed list of essential health care services;

³ World Health Organisation 2024 *Fact Sheet – Nursing and Midwifery* available from: <https://www.who.int/news-room/fact-sheets/detail/nursing-and-midwifery>.

- That sufficient public funding is allocated in Government budgets to cover the full cost of implementing the national essential health care package and that it provides financial protection for all those in need of health care;
- That regular assessment and review of the essential health care package, which involves health services users and providers, is built into national UHC plans and policies;
- That the development and review of national UHC plans and policies includes senior nursing and midwifery leaders to inform policy and decision making.
- That national UHC plans and policies include a sufficient number of appropriately educated and qualified health care workers, equitably distributed, to meet promotive, preventive, curative, rehabilitative and palliative health care services; and
- That national UHC plans and policies include an investment in the education, recruitment and retention of the health workforce for both current and projected future health care needs and the provision for them of safe and supportive working conditions and fair and appropriate remuneration.
- That international recruitment is conducted ethically and in compliance with the standards established by the WHO Global Code of Practice on the International Recruitment of Health Personnel⁴ and the WHO Health Workforce Support and Safeguards List.⁵

⁴ World Health Organisation 2010 *WHO Global Code of Practice on the International Recruitment of Health Personnel* available from <https://www.who.int/publications/i/item/who-global-code-of-practice-on-the-international-recruitment-of-health-personnel>.

⁵ World Health Organisation 2024 *Health Workforce Support and Safeguards List* available from: <https://www.who.int/news-room/questions-and-answers/item/who-health-workforce-support-and-safeguards-list>.