

Can people afford to pay for health care?

WHO Barcelona forum on financial protection in Europe

Sant Pau Art Nouveau Site, Barcelona, Spain

14-15 June 2023

Scope and purpose

Summary

The WHO Barcelona Office for Health Systems Financing is organizing a two-day expert meeting on financial protection – affordable access to health care – to raise awareness of trends in Europe, set the agenda for change and foster policy action.

The meeting will be held in English at the Sant Pau Art Nouveau Site where the WHO Barcelona Office is located. Attendance at the meeting in Barcelona is by invitation only, but plenary sessions will be available through streaming to everyone.

A key objective of the meeting is to obtain expert feedback on two areas of WHO Barcelona Office work in progress: a draft regional report on financial protection covering 40 Member States and the beta version of a new online platform, UHC Watch, which aims to monitor financial protection across the whole of the WHO European Region. The regional report and a full version of the online platform are to be launched later in 2023.

Background and motivation

Ensuring access to health care is affordable for everyone – financial protection – is at the heart of universal health coverage (UHC). Financial protection is undermined by out-of-pocket payments for health care. Out-of-pocket payments can create a financial barrier to access (resulting in *unmet need* for health care) and lead to financial hardship for people using health services (*impoverishing* or *catastrophic health spending*). Lack of financial protection may force people to choose between health care and other basic needs such as food, housing and heating, deepening poverty, eroding health and well-being and increasing social inequalities within and across countries. Because of this, financial protection is widely acknowledged as a core dimension of health system performance.

Countries in Europe first committed to strengthening financial protection through the Tallinn Charter on Health Systems for Health and Wealth, signed in 2008. This was followed by the Sustainable Development Goals in 2015 and the European Pillar of Social Rights in 2017, both of which include a commitment to affordable access to health care.

WHO/Europe has been systematically monitoring financial protection since 2015, first in response to the WHO Regional Committee resolution on Priorities for health systems strengthening in the WHO European Region 2015–2020: walking the talk on people centredness (EUR/RC65/R5), and now as part of the European Programme of Work, 2020–2025 (United Action for Better Health in Europe), which includes moving towards universal health coverage as the first of three core priorities for the WHO European Region.

During that time the WHO Barcelona Office has worked closely with a network of experts to produce country-level and comparative analysis of financial protection. Since 2018 the Office has published 22 country reports on financial protection and a regional report on financial protection covering 24 Member States. In 2023 it will publish a new regional report with updated analysis covering 40 Member States. It will also launch a new online platform, UHC Watch, to disseminate country-level and comparative analysis on financial hardship, unmet need, coverage policy and spending on health for the whole of the WHO European Region.

Meeting objectives

Bring together the European Financial Protection Expert Network.

Raise awareness of new evidence on financial protection: we will present the findings of a draft report on financial protection in 40 Member States including, for the first time, all EU Member States.

Set the agenda for change: drawing on evidence, analysis and good practice from 40 countries, the report identifies what needs to change and why, challenges conventional thinking on coverage policy in Europe and proposes a move away from business as usual.

Foster policy action by sharing experience and showing progress is possible: during the two days participants will share their experience of how they have made progress at country level; debate policy options and implementation; discuss what works and what to avoid: policy ‘dos’ and ‘don’ts’.

Obtain feedback on two key areas of work in progress: a regional report on financial protection and a new online platform, UHC Watch.

Participants

Participants will mainly come from the 40 Member States represented in the forthcoming regional report on financial protection. They will include:

- Experts in 40 countries who are part of the European Financial Protection Network
- Financial protection or UHC focal points nominated by Member States as part of a WHO country consultation on UHC held in 2023
- Experts from partner organizations such as the European Commission, the European Observatory on Health Systems and Policies, the OECD and the European Patients Forum
- Other experts in selected countries