



EMPHNET's Research Digest

Translating Political Commitments into Actions by Designing and Implementing Packages for Priority Services for Universal Health Coverage in the EMR

Introduction

Universal Health Coverage (UHC) represents a fundamental goal for health systems globally, embodying the principle that all individuals and communities should have access to necessary health services, that are of good quality, without suffering financial hardship.

A critical aspect of this endeavor involves addressing the intricate balance of what services to cover, whom to cover, and the extent of coverage.

In the Eastern Mediterranean Region (EMR), this goal is particularly challenging to achieve. Factors such as constrained resources, diverse health needs across populations, and the rapid pace of technological advancements significantly complicate efforts toward realizing UHC.

The year 2018 marked a pivotal moment in the EMR's journey towards UHC with the endorsement of the Salalah Declaration by World Health Organization (WHO) Member States in the region.

This declaration, aligned with the global objective of achieving UHC by 2030, highlights the necessity of establishing clear national health agendas focused on priority service packages. These packages are essential for guiding countries towards a more focused and effective implementation of UHC. However, the development of these packages requires a context-specific approach that takes into consideration the distinct health profiles, resource limitations, and governance structures within each nation in the EMR.

This digest is based on a study titled "Translating Political Commitments into Actions by Designing and Implementing Packages for Priority Services for Universal Health Coverage in the Eastern Mediterranean Region," by the World Health Organization Office for the Eastern Mediterranean, that seeks to provide comprehensive, actionable guidance to assist EMR countries in formulating and implementing equitable service packages under the UHC framework. Utilizing a

blend of narrative reviews, analyses of national health experiences, and insights from expert consultations, it crafted a detailed, step-by-step methodology for developing UHC service packages.

Aims

This study highlights the crucial role of developing and implementing UHC service packages in the EMR, especially in the aftermath of the COVID-19 pandemic. The pandemic drew attention to healthcare access disparities, emphasizing the need for resilient and adaptable health systems. Well-structured UHC packages are key in prioritizing essential services, ensuring equitable and efficient healthcare delivery during crises.

The objective of this study is to develop and offer comprehensive guidance for countries within the EMR in the formulation and implementation of effective service packages aimed at achieving UHC. This guidance is intended to assist these countries in navigating

the complexities of defining and delivering a range of health services that are equitable, efficient, and sustainable, in line with the global goal of UHC.

Methods

The study approach encompassed a multi-faceted methodology. It featured the conducting of extensive narrative reviews to capture a broad spectrum of existing literature and insights on UHC, focusing particularly on the challenges and successes specific to the EMR. In addition to the literature review, it analyzed various national experiences, drawing lessons from different countries within the region that have embarked on the journey towards UHC. This analysis includes an examination of the strategies employed, outcomes achieved, and challenges encountered.

Further enriching the methodology is the incorporation of expert consultation. These experts provided valuable input on the practical aspects of developing and implementing health service packages, including considerations for resource allocation, service prioritization, and stakeholder engagement.

Through this comprehensive approach, the study developed step-by-step guidance designed to be pragmatic, context-sensitive, and adaptable to the diverse needs and circumstances of countries in the EMR. This guidance aims to empower these countries to develop national packages of services for UHC that are not only aligned with global health standards but also tailored to their unique demographic, epidemiological, and socio-economic contexts.

Identifying what to include in a package of services for UHC should follow several principles:



Key Findings: Phases of UHC Service Package Development

The study has identified several crucial insights specific to each phase of the development and implementation of UHC service packages in the EMR.

These findings are outlined as three distinct phases of:

Phase 1 - Preparation:

Advocacy and Awareness:

An initial advocacy campaign serves to mobilize policymakers and stakeholders at various levels. This phase involves planning advocacy campaigns and establishing a committee for planning and development.

Organizational Structure and Mechanism:

The formation of a dedicated committee under the Ministry of Health's leadership is critical. This committee should include diverse representatives from policymaking, health service management, finance, and community groups.

Stakeholder Engagement:

Stakeholder analysis maps critical stakeholders and informs on strategies for their engagement throughout the process, capitalizing on available resources.

Phase 2 - Development:

Situation Analysis:

In-depth analysis of current health systems, governance structures, and resource capacities is crucial.

Data and Evidence:

Priority health problems are identified using a range of data sources, and mapping takes into account the geographic and socioeconomic factors of illness.

Selection Criteria: The selection of interventions is guided by a set of criteria emphasizing quality, context specificity, financial feasibility, and inclusivity. This phase involves extensive consultations to determine the most appropriate interventions.

Phase 3 - Implementation:

Effective Communication and Dissemination:

Communicating the details of the UHC package to stakeholders is vital for ensuring broad understanding and support.

Institutional Readiness and Resource Identification:

Implementation bodies must be well-informed of their roles, and any operational capacity gaps should be addressed.

Monitoring and Evaluation:

Establishing robust monitoring and evaluation mechanisms is essential for tracking the implementation and impact of the service packages. This includes developing indicators and identifying health risks in the population.

The successful implementation of these packages relies on coherent processes, skilled workforce, accountable institutions, and effective resource allocation. As we move forward, integrating comprehensive service packages into health systems offers an opportunity to enhance their responsiveness and efficiency. This guidance is aimed at assisting EMR countries in tailoring UHC packages to their unique contexts, advancing universal health access, and strengthening health systems against future challenges.

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