

Prioritise investments in primary healthcare for universal health coverage: WHO

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Health ministers from member countries emphasised the importance of the PHC approach to achieve UHC and health system resilience



Noting that primary health care (PHC) plays a crucial role in addressing people's health needs close to where they live and work, reduces cost of care, enhances equity, and enables better preparedness and response to pandemics, the World Health Organization has urged member countries in the WHO South-East Asia Region to increase investments to strengthen primary health care as the foundation for universal health coverage (UHC) and health security.

"During the COVID-19 pandemic we have seen that countries with strong primary health care systems were able to respond better and faster to the pandemic, while also maintaining essential services with minimal disruption," said Dr Poonam Khetrpal Singh, Regional Director, WHO South-East Asia Region, at a high-level meeting.

The Regional Director was speaking at a virtual meeting that included the health ministers from member countries to commemorate UHC day and launch the South-East Regional Strategy for PHC. At the meeting, ministers emphasised the importance of the PHC approach to achieve UHC and health system resilience. The Ministers of Health pointed to both the timeliness and value of the Regional PHC Strategy to help drive necessary PHC-oriented transformation across the Region.

'PHC is the key that unlocks UHC – through simultaneously addressing concerns related to equity and efficiency. We need a paradigm shift to ensure that primary health care is provided throughout the life course with a focus on prevention and well-being that is organized around the comprehensive needs and expectations of the people and communities,' said the Regional Director.

"One of the key lessons of the COVID-19 pandemic is that the best defense against disease outbreak and other health emergencies is resilient primary health care as the foundation of universal health coverage. Many of the countries that have responded most effectively to COVID-19 are those that had invested adequately in PHC," said WHO Director-General Dr Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus, at the meeting.