Introduction

Universal health coverage (UHC) is a cornerstone of efforts to achieve better health and development outcomes, providing a platform for achievement of the health-related targets of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). Following the endorsement of the UHC regional action framework, *Universal Health Coverage: Moving Towards Better Health*, at the sixty-sixth session of the WHO Regional Committee for the Western Pacific in October 2015, WHO developed three guidance documents: *Regional Action Agenda on Achieving the Sustainable Development Goals in the Western Pacific*, *SDG & UHC Regional Monitoring Framework*, and *Universal Health Coverage and Health in the Sustainable Development Goals Baseline Report*.

WHO also established and convened the UHC Technical Advisory Group (TAG). In addition, WHO has supported Member States with country-specific challenges and priorities to strengthen the attributes of high-performing health systems – quality, efficiency, equity, accountability, sustainability and resilience.

Quality

The quality and safety of health services, delivered at the individual and population levels, are fundamental to UHC. WHO support over the past year included training on hospital quality and patient safety and a meeting of the health-care quality improvement network.

To improve access to quality medicines, WHO supported strengthening of regulatory systems by convening the regional alliance for national regulatory authorities, subregional workshops for the Mekong and the Pacific, and technical support to countries on national regulatory authority benchmarking, quality management system development and pharmacovigilance. Support on traditional medicine included a regional meeting held in Seoul, Republic of Korea, hands-on laboratory training,
Health Systems

Analyses in 11 countries. Support was provided to Member States in shaping incentives for appropriate service provision including in Cambodia, China, the Lao People’s Democratic Republic, Mongolia and Viet Nam.

Equity

Leaving no one behind is a core principle of both UHC and the SDGs. WHO supported Member States to improve financial protection and reduce barriers to access. In Viet Nam, WHO prepared a series of policy briefs and undertook policy dialogues on health sector reform, including health workforce education, strengthening of primary health care and improving linkages with hospitals. WHO also led a policy roundtable in Singapore on integrated, people-centred services.

The Third Meeting on Access to Medicines under UHC in the Asia Pacific Region discussed improved access to high-cost medicines and price setting. The Price Information Exchange for Medicines was relaunched, and Malaysia, the Philippines and the Republic of Korea shared their latest pricing data. Technical support was provided for underserved populations including development of policies that foster healthy and active ageing, for health workforce distribution, and for facilitated expansion of the Global Network for Age-friendly Cities and Communities in the Western Pacific Region.

Efficiency

Making the best use of resources for health is increasingly important in the context of reduced external funding for health and the increasing costs of health care. WHO supported Member States in the alignment of health system architecture to population needs, including revision of the role delineation policy in Solomon Islands, minimum-package-of-activities guidelines in Cambodia, and documentation of integrated service delivery models in New Zealand and Solomon Islands.

WHO also supported the development of an analytical framework for sustainable financing of public health priorities and technical support in Cambodia, Mongolia and Viet Nam, as well as the generation and use of national health accounts and household survey data.

Sustainable and effective pharmaceutical systems, with safe, effective and affordable medicines available at all levels of health care, are crucial for UHC.
Accountability

Accountability entails stakeholders providing information and justifying their decisions and actions, with the imposition of sanctions and rewards. Work has progressed on the development of health information systems including for the health workforce and traditional medicine, as well as for the analysis and use of this information for policy dialogue and decision-making.

WHO also worked with Member States to strengthen government leadership and the rule of law through the review of legislative frameworks, including a review of public health legislation in Viet Nam and support to the Philippines on responding to potential federalist constitutional reforms. WHO continued to support the Health Leadership Development Initiative and Global Health Learning Centre as key health leadership development initiatives in the Region.

Sustainability and resilience

WHO has worked across technical divisions to support Member States in improving the sustainability and resilience of health systems. In particular, essential public health functions were introduced as a key theme in work on health system development and were a key focus for the UHC TAG in 2016.

Related technical assistance and support to Member States over the past year included work on sustainable financing and the transition from global health initiatives, linkages between communicable and noncommunicable disease control, and health system implications of the International Health Regulations, known as IHR (2005). The health system team participated in the IHR (2005) Joint External Evaluation process for Viet Nam.

Next steps

WHO will continue to support Member States in the development and implementation of their road maps for UHC as a platform for the achievement of the SDGs. The 2017 UHC TAG meeting will provide the opportunity to review progress, share lessons learnt, and prioritize at the country and regional levels. WHO will continue to facilitate and develop new partnerships and new ways of working to realize the ambitions of the SDGs and ensure that no one is left behind.

WHO and partners support the first national multi-stakeholder workshop on antimicrobial resistance in the Lao People’s Democratic Republic during the 2016 World Antibiotic Awareness Week.