

GSK Public policy positions

Universal Health Coverage

The Issue

Universal Health Coverage (UHC) is the idea that all people should receive quality health services that they need without experiencing financial hardship as a result. This concept is not new, but it has gained importance, visibility and relevance in recent years.

GSK is fully committed to realising the UHC goal via a thoughtful transition that meets the shared goals of industry, governments and others to expand patient access to medicines and services while preserving incentives for future innovation and sustainability.

As a science and values led global healthcare company GSK has an important role to play in improving the health, well-being and access to medicines of millions of people around the world. We want to help people to do more, feel better and live long healthy lives regardless of where they live or their ability to pay. The policies that governments implement in pursuit of UHC will impact on all stakeholders involved in improving health, including the private sector. To this end, we stand ready to work with all stakeholders to ensure a sustainable and equitable approach to UHC. GSK is already pursuing flexible business models to try and ensure both innovation and access, including open innovation approaches, tiered pricing, voluntary licencing, technology transfer and working in public private partnerships.¹

This paper outlines what we see as the 8 core principles that governments may consider when determining their own approaches to UHC. We understand that countries are at very different stages of health system development, and they will need to set their own priorities and timelines towards UHC.

The Challenge

Currently 1 billion people lack access to basic health care and more than 2 billion people do not have regular access to essential medicines. Governments are therefore increasingly exploring the promise of UHC. International bodies such as the World Health Organization, United Nations and World Bank are engaging with governments on how to progress towards UHC. UHC is a key target in the UN Sustainable Development Goals “to achieve Universal Health Coverage, including financial risk protection, access to quality essential health care services, and access to safe, effective, quality, and affordable essential medicines and vaccines for all”.

Although countries have made significant progress in strengthening many aspects of health systems, there still remain significant inequalities in access to healthcare. Progress toward UHC is tied to reforming how health systems are financed, improving governance structures, strengthening health infrastructure and delivery, utilizing health information technology, ensuring access to innovative and essential medicines, improving health literacy and reshaping the health workforce. There is also increasing recognition that UHC cannot be achieved without continued needs-based medical innovation, alongside expanded access to free or affordable essential interventions.

GSK Core Principles

As every country has a unique health system, tailored approaches and timelines will be required. It is understood that for some countries it may take a very long time to truly reach UHC. It should be recognised that changes in demographics, lifestyles, patient expectations and developments in medical progress mean that UHC is a moving target, however wherever possible specific targets and milestones should be included. Governments will need to set their own priorities - for some the focus will be on increasing the services available, for others the priority will be reaching underserved populations. For all a focus on prevention (including early diagnosis, screening etc) and not just on treatment is essential - expenditure on health should be seen as an investment rather than a cost.

GSK believes that there are eight core principles that should inform the design of UHC policies: equity, efficiency, quality, inclusiveness, evidence-based decision making, availability, affordability/funding and innovation.

¹ For more information see: www.gsk.com

Equity: no one should remain untreated or be discriminated against, for reason of gender, age, race, geographical location, economic or social status.

- A focus on the patient should be central to the thinking and actions of all stakeholders
- All people should have fair access to a basic and appropriate package of essential health care services without suffering financial hardship
- Governments should provide a public safety net for the most vulnerable populations and individuals, which, where possible, avoids out-of-pocket payments through risk-pooling mechanisms
- Where appropriate, private health insurance as well as hybrid solutions should be employed, particularly for growing middle- and upper-income populations to release public funding for more vulnerable groups and raise the overall level of health provision
- Whilst equity must be strived for, lowest common denominator approaches should be avoided. Where feasible, options for patient choice in HC service delivery should be encouraged to ensure that there is an in-built pressure to continuously improve standards of care

Efficiency: in a resource-constrained world, all stakeholders should ensure that resources for health, especially for primary care, are used as efficiently as possible, that waste and corruption are eliminated, that prevention is prioritised and that value for money is secured.

- Recognising differences in epidemiology, governments should prioritise and focus suitable resources on the diseases and populations where the need is greatest (e.g. maternal and child health, neglected tropical diseases, malaria or non-communicable diseases). The improvement and harmonisation of health surveillance tools would contribute to the prioritisation exercise
- Prevention initiatives should be prioritised as an investment in the future well-being of society, which will save costs in the long run. Healthcare systems should seek to increase access to primary care initiatives and focus on disease management for infectious and chronic illness
- Medicines should be prescribed rationally. Patients should receive the appropriate medicine, in the proper dose, and be encouraged to adhere to the prescribed treatment for an adequate period of time, providing the greatest value to them and their community
- The healthcare workforce must be appropriately resourced to ensure that the optimum number and distribution of adequately paid, properly trained health care professionals is achieved
- Health Care Professionals incentives tied to priority healthcare outcomes should be deployed to support optimal care delivery to patients
- Efficiency within the medicines supply chain has to be improved so that safe, quality-assured and cost efficient products can reach the patients who need them as affordably as possible
- A good balance between competition in the pharmaceutical marketplace and government regulation is both possible and necessary. Market pricing for non-reimbursed medicines should be in place, wherever appropriate. Only prices for reimbursed or government purchased products need be negotiated and fair competition should be ensured for multi-supplier (off-patent) products
- Synergies and partnerships with relevant stakeholders should be actively promoted to avoid duplication of efforts and costs and to improve healthcare efficiency
- Policies encouraging the use of appropriate OTC medicines should be actively implemented where those medicines provide a clear health benefit
- Evidence-based policies on the appropriate use of generics as well as other healthcare technologies and interventions will deliver health care savings and free up resources for investments in innovative medicines and vaccines that address unmet needs

Quality: all relevant health interventions, facilities and products should be of appropriate quality with common standards applied to all.

- Internationally recognized quality standards should be applied in the manufacturing and regulation of all healthcare products
- Consideration should be given to streamlining and harmonising stringent regulatory processes, with a focus on seeking regional solutions where possible to speed up patient access to medicines and vaccines and avoid duplication of efforts
- Appropriate measures should be put in place to prevent counterfeit and sub-standard medicines

- Ethical, responsible and patient-centred promotional practices should be supported by all stakeholders to ensure that HCPs and patients receive sufficient, accurate and objective information and that conflicts of interest are avoided. Appropriate sanctions should be applied when standards are not met
- The commitment of all stakeholders to highest ethical standards, behaviours and compliance with relevant laws and regulations, as well as pursuing anti-bribery and corruption policies will help to improve transparency and accountability in allocation of resources

Inclusiveness: a multi-stakeholder approach must be followed in the design, transition to and implementation of UHC to ensure unified and continuous patient focus.

- All stakeholders facilitated by governments should collaborate to strengthen the health infrastructure, identify key healthcare needs and ensure that services delivered reflect patient needs and expectations
- Transparent stakeholder engagement practises have to be in place to ensure that decisions concerning UHC policies are fair, reasonable and non-discriminatory
- Patients, civil society organizations and others should be able to hold governments and healthcare providers to account for delivering results. If appropriate, they could be also invited to consultation sessions when national UHC strategies are being conceived, designed, debated and reviewed
- Public-private partnerships that leverage international best practices should be thoroughly explored. “One-size-fits-all” solutions can limit further growth
- Options for patient choice in healthcare service delivery should be considered to ensure that health systems are designed to meet the wants and needs of patients
- Health Technology Assessments (HTAs) should be based on early and inclusive dialogue, including where appropriate with patients

Evidence based decision making: it is important to ensure that all decisions to prioritise funding are based on sound evidence and that resources are provided to generate evidence which is actionable.

- Tools for measuring value/innovation, such as (HTAs) can play a role. They should be appropriately conducted to support the decisions being made and resource/capability available. This may initially be a simple set of criteria, rather than sophisticated clinical and economic analyses
- The evaluation must achieve a reasonable balance between the interests of payers, patients, physicians, and industry. The goal of the HTA process should be to improve patient care and physician decision-making
- Spending decisions should not only be applied to medicines, but other health system investments and trade-offs to optimise delivery of patient outcomes
- All sources of value (including clinical, cost, societal & system) and data should be considered
- Flexibility is needed to enable a pragmatic partnership approach, to manage uncertainty and the inclusion of new data
- Clear, specific and time-bounded targets and deliverables must be set to monitor progress, to hold all stakeholders accountable and to prioritise scarce resources

Availability: governments should seek to ensure that all health services and products, and information about them, should be available and accessible to all those who need them.

- Shortages in or inefficiency of the medicines, medical devices and technology supply chain should be addressed, so that the goods and services can reach all patients, when they need them as affordably as possible and ideally free at the point of use
- Healthcare services have to be physically available for patients who need them, especially in underserved populations
- New interventions should be assessed and made available to patients as soon as possible keeping in mind safety and efficacy and cost-effectiveness
- All patients and healthcare professionals should have meaningful access to health education and prevention messages to improve health literacy and understanding
- All patients should have the ability to make choices about their healthcare supported by appropriate and practical access to information, and the pharmaceutical industry can play a important role in this

Affordability & funding: governments need to provide adequate financing and all stakeholders need to work together to improve affordability of medicines and ensure sustainable health care, which will help to drive economic prosperity of each country.

- Governments should aim to break down funding silos between healthcare and social care spend, in order to allow increases in health investment to be offset by lower social affairs expenditure
- Affordability, or free provision, of health services should be addressed through sustainable health care financing mechanisms. Governments should look at new funding options, including, where appropriate, a greater role for private health insurance, appropriate tax-based measures, and an efficient supply chain that manages costs and supports innovation
- Where appropriate, market-based approaches in which companies are free to set prices and companies compete with each other on the basis of value, price and quality, are often the best way to ensure cost-effectiveness along the pharmaceuticals value chain
- Tiered pricing of vaccines and medicines, both between and within countries, should be encouraged and facilitated to maximise sustainable access
- Over time and as soon as possible, out of pocket payments as the only way to access health services, medicines, and vaccines should be reduced or eliminated through government provision
- To promote greater affordability, prevention policies and preventative interventions such as vaccines and primary care services should be strengthened to avoid misuse and overuse of medical services
- Evaluation systems should consider the overall value of health interventions and not just their cost

Innovation: healthcare systems should foster innovation that encourages continued investment in R&D across the spectrum of prevention, treatment, care and support targeted at patient need.

- The government, private sector, and civil society should be focused on developing holistic, sustainable approaches to health care financing that support continuous innovation
- New approaches and interventions which deliver value and improve people's health and well-being and reduce the long term cost burden on healthcare systems should be prioritised
- Pricing and reimbursement policies should reflect the value delivered. The reward society gives to an innovative medicine should reflect the value it delivers to patients, healthcare systems, and society at large. This can be recognised in different forms, e.g. price level, unrestricted access to the patient population defined as needing new therapy, therapeutic guidelines recognising a new therapy, and speed of access
- Appropriate enactment and enforcement of patent protection and data exclusivity should be assured to support R&D investments to address areas of unmet medical need

Conclusion

The UHC concept is important to all countries. It's a journey that they will travel at their own pace given their own needs and capacities. In order to be successful all countries must be at the centre of this process, taking the lead in setting direction, developing and executing strategies as well as monitoring progress and adjusting if necessary. Each country will need to set its own priorities and find its own balance between these principles. The global healthcare industry has an important role to play in helping to achieve progress towards UHC all around the world, through its support for the principle as well as examining its business to help support access to medicines. GSK is committed to supporting the realisation of UHC by working closely with all stakeholders in order to ensure that all patients receive the quality health care and medicines they need without impoverishment.

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