

State of UHC in Africa Commission report launched

Carol Natukunda reports on the Africa Health Agenda International Conference 2021

The 4th edition of the Africa Health Agenda International Conference (AHAIC) was hosted virtually from 8-10 March 2021 under the theme, “Decade for Action: Driving Momentum to Achieve UHC in Africa.”

AHAIC is an African-led biennial global health conference hosted by Amref. It attracted about 3,000 participants logging in from 98 countries across the African continent and beyond, including high profile speakers such as the President of Kenya, H.E. Uhuru Kenyatta, World Health Organization (WHO) Director General Dr Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus and the WHO-Afro Director Dr Matshidiso Moeti, among others.

Held against the backdrop of COVID-19 recovery efforts, AHAIC 2021 provided a platform to explore the continent’s health challenges, identify opportunities and propose sustainable solutions for and by Africa.

Conversations on the COVID-19 vaccine, health financing, health systems strengthening, technology and innovation, youth engagement and gender equity in health leadership took centre stage, with speakers repeatedly calling for a unified, pan-African approach built on stronger political will and action to drive momentum towards achieving UHC in Africa by 2030.

President Kenyatta called for greater political will, collaboration and coordination among African nations to make UHC a reality, and highlighted the need for countries to focus on investment in primary health care, expand affordability and harness the innovativeness of youth to promote the uptake of e-health solutions.

On vaccine equity, availability, affordability and delivery, stakeholders reiterated the need for Africa to urgently create its own capacity to manufacture and distribute the COVID-19 vaccine, in response to heightened nationalism that has threatened to deny lower- and middle-income countries access to the critical vaccine.

Dr Tedros: “In order to ensure vaccine equity, it is important that we build Africa’s manufacturing capacity. We have seen it with the COVID-19 pandemic, from personal protective equipment to vaccines, lack of equity in distribution is affecting many developing countries that don’t have manufacturing capacity.”

Prof Francis Omaswa, Executive Director of the African Centre for Global Health and Social Transformation (ACHEST) and AHAIC Commissioner, was a panelist at a session on leadership. He highlighted the need for social accountability and the importance of leaning into humanity to achieve social justice, which is necessary

Carol Natukunda is a Communications Specialist at the African Center for Global Health and Social Transformation (ACHEST), Kampala, Uganda.

for the attainment of UHC

Other highlights from the conference were:

- The launch of the State of the UHC in Africa report by the independent AHAIC Commission. The report highlights the progress made by African countries towards realising Health for All and details the challenges and opportunities faced by countries on their journeys to UHC. It also provides key recommendations that African countries should adopt to accelerate progress towards UHC, such as re-orienting health systems and health system priorities to respond to population health needs, and prioritising and strengthening primary health care as the foundation for UHC.
- The launch of the “Future Proofing Healthcare Africa Sustainability Index” which provides a unique overview of the status of health systems across the continent and contains a ranking of countries based on 76 different measures.
- Joint calls for the ratification of the African Medicines Agency (AMA) by African Union (AU) member states. AMA is a specialised agency of the AU charged with providing regulatory leadership to harmonise and strengthen regulatory systems which govern the regulation of medicines and medical products on the African continent. The treaty for the AMA’s formation was adopted by the AU in February 2019 but is yet to be ratified by all countries.

Eight action points

- To uphold health as a right of every person regardless of their status, gender or age.
- Political goodwill must match domestic financing and increased investments in health systems.
- African countries must strengthen emergency preparedness and health security to build back better and mitigate the adverse effects of future health emergencies.
- Strengthen Primary Health Care as a cornerstone of UHC.
- To ensure gender transformative policies and meaningful engagement of Africa’s youth for the attainment of UHC.
- That UHC requires Pan-African collaboration and collective stakeholder engagement, governed by robust frameworks for public-private partnerships.
- Harness innovation and digital technologies to strengthen access to quality health care services.
- An enabling environment for accountability must be in place to ensure that health commitments are achieved and upheld.