Universal Health Coverage: A sign of the times

The world is buzzing for Universal Health Coverage (UHC). Following major efforts by the World Health Organization to promote this human rights-based approach to achieving health care, including 2011 and 2012’s Global Symposium on Health Systems Research (HSR), health financing and health systems strengthening policy and programmes are being defined and redefined towards the path of achieving Universal Health Coverage.

Equity as key

Policymakers, academics, multilaterals and civil society alike claim a stake of the UHC discourse, as the impacts of Universal Health Coverage resonate beyond the achievement of affordable, accessible health care by all. UHC at the forefront brings on key discussions in equity, priorities of major players like UNICEF, World Bank, and MIC/LMIC governments alike. Moreover, the UHC debate is dynamic, with a foundation stemming from the state welfare systems of Britain and Germany, Beveridge and Bismarck, which address systems financed by taxes for national health systems or contributions for state-sponsored health insurance. While these models have influenced the present day, the stakeholders use these lessons combined with recent studies in equity to develop novel pathways toward the achievement of UHC.

IHEA: Towards identifying strategies

With this in mind, the next endeavor towards understanding new approaches in health financing, health systems strengthening, and methodology and practice of health economics will be 2013’s International Health Economics Association Congress, to take place July 6-10, 2013 in Sydney, Australia. Nossal supports research, programme, and policy in the pursuit of UHC pathways through identifying and enabling Social Health Protection strategies geared towards the socio-economic and political context of its research partners’ national health systems.

Nossal and IHEA: Social Health Protection collaboration

Nossal will be involved with this year’s IHEA Congress through research aimed at: supply & demand side financing mechanisms, governance in national health insurance, international perspectives on Health Equity Funds and the roles which these mechanisms play within broader Health Care Financing contexts (collection, pooling, purchasing). Firstly, Nossal and partners WHO-Western Pacific Regional Office will host a half day session dedicated to four national health insurance systems, Vietnam, The Philippines, China, and Mongolia. The session objective aims to identify lessons learned from governance of these systems, which can be applied to the design and implementation efforts made by regional neighbors, such as Cambodia and Lao PDR, in promoting effectiveness in health care financing. In addition to this,
Nossal will host a session featuring research on the effectiveness of combining different supply and demand-side approaches to investigate strategies in strengthening service delivery and improved access in Cambodia’s district public health facilities. Finally, Nossal will also be hosting a myriad of individual sessions dedicated to exploring the many facets of Health Equity Funds, pro-poor fee-waiver schemes that aim to provide increased access to health services and greater community involvement for the poor. These sessions will explore types of Health Equity Funds in Bangladesh, Pakistan, and Cambodia, and the implications and ways forward in making this mechanism a critical step towards UHC.

Along the path of UHC

From Cambodia to Bangladesh to Laos, Nossal’s support of HSR and IHEA contribute to understanding health financing arrangements that effectively contribute to equity, cooperatively working with key partners to hold all stakeholders accountable as well as understand and effectively meet the needs of the poor.