

Universal Health Coverage (UHC):

Putting the Last Mile First



Images by Molly Hankinson



UHC refers to the global goal of providing all people with the healthcare they need without creating undue financial burdens on the individual.



2030

In ratifying the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) United Nations member states committed themselves to achieving UHC by 2030.

While some countries already have comprehensive public health systems, many still have poor health provision and access to services, particularly for criminalised key populations such as sex workers.

The UN General Assembly agreed the Political Declaration on UHC in 2019, including provisions on equity and non-discrimination, ensuring that “no one is left behind.”

However, the Declaration...

X ...failed to name criminalised key populations or recognise the impact of criminalisation on sex workers including on their access to health care.



X ...paid little attention to community involvement in achieving UHC.



X ...failed to reaffirm health as a human right or specific financial commitments by governments.



Implications of UHC for sex workers



NSWP research showed that sex workers were not adequately consulted with or engaged in UHC development in their countries.



Healthcare systems continue to exclude, stigmatise and discriminate against sex workers.



While many sex workers agreed with the concept of UHC in principle, they struggled to envisage how it could improve their access to health care without further stigmatisation.

UHC will not be achieved unless the legal, political, and social determinants of health are addressed. UHC must take a human rights-based approach, ensuring equitable access to health services, and meaningfully involvement of sex workers. Criminalised key populations need UN agencies, governments, and civil society to uphold the Political Declaration's call “to reach the furthest behind first.”



Recommendations:

International human rights and health bodies and national governments

Include in all UHC frameworks:

- ✓ A commitment to the decriminalisation of sex work
- ✓ A rights-based approach to address the legal and structural barriers to health
- ✓ Investment in sex worker-led organisations and responses
- ✓ Inclusion of sexual and reproductive health and rights, including HIV, within UHC
- ✓ Meaningfully involve sex workers in the planning and monitoring of national health responses



Sex worker-led organisations

- ✓ Increase understanding of UHC and advocate for the inclusion of sex workers
- ✓ Become involved in national planning processes on UHC and ensure sex workers are meaningfully involved in these forums
- ✓ Join forces with other civil society groups that advocate for health equity and rights, and ensure that sex workers' voices and demands are included in UHC processes.



Read the NSWP Briefing Paper on Universal Health Coverage: Putting the Last Mile First: <https://www.nswp.org/resource/nswp-briefing-papers/briefing-paper-universal-health-coverage-putting-the-last-mile-first> or <https://bit.ly/NSWP-UHC>