

ACTIONS GOVERNMENTS SHOULD TAKE FOR ADOLESCENTS' HEALTH

AN ACCOUNTABILITY AGENDA TO ENSURE UNIVERSAL HEALTH COVERAGE FOR ADOLESCENTS

Introduction

Adolescents are a vibrant population of every country and the voters of the future. They have a right to be heard and have a right to health. They will play a central role in achieving the 2030 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).

Today, there are 1.2 billion people aged 10-19 years. That is 16% of the world's population. Many demand a more sustainable future. This includes health – a fundamental right of every human being.

Universal health coverage (UHC) is a target of SDG3, which countries have agreed to deliver. **Governments hold the ultimate responsibility for embracing UHC and supporting its implementation.** To make UHC work for adolescents, governments need to invest in their health, now and in the long term. This will not only help young people as individuals but also result in a healthier, more productive workforce. It will greatly reduce poverty and disease passed down the generations. As part of UHC, governments should prioritize people who are marginalized or vulnerable – paying particular attention to the special needs and vulnerabilities of adolescent girls – so that no one is left behind.

A strong accountability system is essential to ensure these results are delivered. It should uphold rights and ensure effective use of resources. **Government leaders and ministries need to spearhead accountability for adolescent health and UHC.**

This accountability brief outlines critical actions governments should take to develop and strengthen accountability mechanisms. It covers the entire accountability cycle – **MONITOR, REVIEW, ACT and REMEDY** – to ensure adolescents' health and rights within UHC.

MONITOR



REVIEW



ACT



REMEDY



Why adolescents need government support and accountability

- **Every year 1.2 million (every day 3000) adolescents die, mainly from preventable causes**, including road injury, interpersonal violence and self-harm.
- Up to **50%** of all mental health issues start **before 14 years of age**. **Suicide** is a leading cause of death among adolescents.
- Lives could be saved and adolescents' health improved dramatically by annual investment of **US\$5.2 per capita** across 75 low-income and middle-income countries. This would deliver **economic and social benefits at 10 times** the cost by **saving 12.5 million lives** and preventing more than **30 million unwanted pregnancies**. Investments are needed in programmes to improve physical, mental, sexual, and reproductive health and to reduce road traffic injuries.
- More than **130 million people need humanitarian assistance**. They are often forced to flee their homes at risk of **injury, trauma and gender-based violence**. The most vulnerable are children and adolescents.

What actions should government take to ensure accountability for adolescents' health?

Governments need to act to ensure UHC for all. For adolescents, this means introducing health services that address the unique health issues of this age group. Governments should prioritize the hardest-to-reach adolescents in UHC, and create robust monitoring, accountability and oversight mechanisms.

WHOLE-OF-GOVERNMENT ACTIONS

1. Promote meaningful adolescent participation.

- To include input and feedback in defining the UHC package for adolescents.
- Encouraging feedback via social media and similar channels.

2. Identify all adolescents, especially those left furthest behind.

- Prioritize UHC for adolescents living in poverty and fragile settings, and with disabilities, HIV, mental illness and other health conditions. Regularly monitor and prioritize their needs.
- Ensure adequate financial protection mechanisms are in place, prioritizing adolescents who are marginalized or face discrimination.

3. Foster a whole-of-government and whole-of-society approach to accountability.

- Initiate multistakeholder and multisectoral collaboration on UHC for adolescents.
- Ensure timely and adequate monitoring, review, remedy and action to guarantee UHC for all.

4. Make the case for adolescents.

- Use quality data (disaggregated by sex and age) to show the importance of investing in adolescent health, for them and for society.

5. Ensure quality of care and track spending.

- Assess the quality, accessibility and equity of health services provided.
- Inform all adolescents about their entitlements to UHC and how to access services.
- Track spending at all levels ensuring resources for adolescents reach them and are effectively used.

ACTIONS AT MINISTRY LEVEL

1. MINISTRIES OF FINANCE and PLANNING should work with other ministries to:

- Ensure adequate and equitable UHC financing for adolescent health and to ensure free access to essential goods and services at the point of service delivery.
- Ensure strong oversight institutions at all levels. This requires having information on health financing costs, prices and expenditures to include specific adolescent health interventions in UHC packages.
- Mobilize and allocate funds, distribute financial risks, and monitor the use of resources.

2. MINISTRIES OF HEALTH should invest in adolescent health as part of UHC and health system strengthening.

- Introduce a comprehensive, equitable and evidence-based package of essential interventions that meets the unique needs of all adolescents, irrespective of their background or financial means.
- Create an adolescent-friendly health workforce, trained in human rights and gender equality.

- Consider a wide range of costed essential health services to include in the package.
- Include mental health services, disease prevention, health promotion, comprehensive sexuality education and counseling and prevention of gender-based and sexual violence.

3. MINISTRIES OF EDUCATION should put schools at the centre of health promotion and disease prevention for adolescents.

In collaboration with ministries of finance and health, ensure schools:

- Offer affordable, good-quality education in safe places free from discrimination, violence and bullying.
- Include comprehensive sexuality education, sanitation facilities and nutritious meals where needed.
- Serve as centers for health promotion, educating families and communities about adolescent health.

4. MINISTRIES OF SOCIAL JUSTICE should create a legal framework that supports adolescent health.

- Ensure meaningful oversight by institutions to prevent discrimination against adolescents in UHC.
- Remove legal obstacles to accessing essential goods and services freely, equitably and with dignity.
- Ensure there is no need for out-of-pocket expenditure at the point of service delivery. Identify and remove discriminatory laws, regulations and financial constraints.
- Ensure institutions provide respectful, stigma-free, adolescent- and gender responsive services.

5. MINISTRIES OF TRANSPORT should ensure protective laws and policies for road safety for adolescents.

6. MINISTRIES OF INFORMATION should ensure availability of health information in adolescently-friendly formats.

7. MINISTRIES OF AGRICULTURE should ensure laws and regulation regarding adolescents' diet and food safety.

8. ALL MINISTRIES JOINTLY are accountable for clear monitoring and account ability mechanisms.

- Regularly gather and share disaggregated data to identify and prioritize adolescents left behind.
- Publish annual assessment reports for parliamentarians and the public.
- Include regular independent evaluations that propose remedies and promote prompt implementation of recommendations.
- Engage with adolescents meaningfully and support them to influence health decision-making.

ABOUT THE IAP

The Independent Accountability Panel for Every Woman, Every Child, Every Adolescent (IAP) is appointed by the UN Secretary-General. It is composed of an internationally-recognized group of experts in health and human rights, who serve in their individual capacities. The IAP's main functions are to:

- Independently review progress and accountabilities towards achieving the EWEC Global Strategy objectives aligned with Universal Health Coverage (UHC) and Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) 3; and provide actionable recommendations
- Disseminate IAP reviews and recommendations to support country action and impact
- Promote accountability principles and advocate for remedy and action.

The IAP is the only independent accountability mechanism established under the SDGs so far. The panel recommends the development of an integrated accountability mechanism under UHC, addressing non-communicable and communicable diseases, emergencies and other SDG 3 issues. It should prioritize accountability for the health of women, children and adolescents, and others left furthest behind.

This brief is developed by the IAP based on the IAP's 2017 report "[Transformative Accountability for Adolescents](#)". The IAP has taken into consideration contributions from PMNCH, the H6 agencies, The Rockefeller Foundation and other partners.