

# ACTIONS PARLIAMENTS 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. **Parliaments represent communities and are responsible for oversight, influencing policymaking and budget allocation that embraces UHC.** To make UHC work for adolescents, parliaments need to ensure governments 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, parliaments should urge governments to 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. **Parliaments, as the law-making branch of governments, have special responsibilities for oversight, accountability, budget appropriations and representation.**

This accountability brief outlines critical actions parliaments 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 parliament support on accountability

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- **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 parliaments take to ensure accountability for adolescents' health?

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Parliaments should hold governments to account for delivering 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.

### ADVOCACY ACTIONS

#### Make a case for adolescents.

- Introduce the UHC investment case for adolescents.
- Generate parliamentary debate using quality data to show the importance of investing in health for their rights, needs and well-being, and for wider society and national development.

- Ensure that excluded and marginalized adolescents become priority UHC beneficiaries.
- Create adequate financial protection mechanisms for vulnerable groups including the urban and rural poor, those with disabilities or discriminated against on the grounds of gender, sexual orientation, race, ethnicity.

## **LEGISLATIVE ACTIONS**

### **Ensure legal protections, enforcement and remedies of human rights for adolescents.**

- Raise legal minimum age of marriage and prohibit female genital mutilation.
- Pass laws that promote healthy life styles, including preventing NCDs risk factors.
- Remove laws and policies that pose barriers to accessing health services or that violate adolescents' rights, including sexual and reproductive health and rights (SRHR).
- Remove discriminatory laws as well as third-party authorization requirements to access services allowing adolescents to be considered 'mature minors'.
- Protect and empower the e-generation and take concerted measures to stop on-line abuses.
- Raise public awareness of the rights and entitlements of adolescents as well as how to seek redress.

## **OVERSIGHT ACTIONS**

### **Ensure effective oversight of measures to ensure UHC for adolescents.**

- Request that annual multisectoral assessment reports are published for parliamentarians and the public.
- Include independent reviews with proposed priority actions and remedies that enable course correction and learning under the UHC within the health sector and in other relevant sectors.
- Support independent oversight institutions at all levels with adequate autonomy, authority, capacities and funding to protect the human rights and health of adolescents.
- Support independent and participatory formal accountability mechanisms.
- Nurture social accountability initiatives to understand which adolescents are left behind and their needs.
- Strengthen effective complaint and grievance mechanisms.

## TRANSPARENCY AND PARTICIPATION ACTIONS

**Make oversight processes transparent and inclusive and reports publicly available.**

- Pass legal reforms that establish transparent and effective institutional oversight under the whole-of-government multisectoral plans.
- Involve adolescents and young people in parliamentary committees and consultations.
- Ensure their meaningful participation, including specific actions to reach adolescent females.

## BUDGETARY ACTIONS

**Ensure inclusion of budgetary appropriations for legislation.**

- Promote adolescent-responsive budgeting and strategic purchasing.
- Assess the quality, accessibility and equitability of health services provided under the UHC package.
- Track expenditures at all levels ensuring resources for adolescents reach them, in particular the hardest to reach, and are effectively used.

### 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**".

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