Universal health coverage (UHC) is the principle that all individuals should have access to quality essential health services, without experiencing financial hardship. Achieving UHC means that health care is available to people everywhere, and that no one is left behind.\(^1\) \(^2\) Achieving UHC by 2030 is one of the targets of the UN Sustainable Development Goals (SDG target 3.8).\(^3\) It is also a key pillar of the World Health Organization's (WHO) strategy, which recommends reorienting health systems towards primary health care to achieve health for all.\(^4\) Primary health care is centred on integrating health services and empowering communities to take charge of their own health.\(^5\)

Many hepatitis-related services are delivered at the primary health care level.\(^6\) Strengthening the role of hepatitis elimination in primary health care improves patient outcomes and increases access to care.

Hepatitis elimination is a key component of UHC, as it helps to strengthen health systems, engage underserved communities, enhance vaccination programmes, reduce cancer mortalities and strengthen HIV responses. By achieving UHC, people everywhere gain access to essential hepatitis services.

**UHC CREATES NEW OPPORTUNITIES FOR HEPATITIS ELIMINATION**

Achieving UHC alongside hepatitis elimination is key as they work together to improve access to health care and strengthen health outcomes. The WHO Global Health Sector Strategies on HIV, viral hepatitis and sexually transmitted infections 2022-2030 (GHSS), recommends integrating viral hepatitis services into UHC responses to achieve both hepatitis elimination and advance UHC.\(^7\)

However, achieving hepatitis elimination faces many barriers. There is a lack of funding opportunities and insufficient political will for hepatitis. Low- and middle-income countries often face a heavier burden of hepatitis\(^8\) \(^9\) and don’t have the necessary resources to implement hepatitis elimination.\(^10\)
Significant investment is needed in hepatitis prevention, testing and treatment services to achieve hepatitis elimination by 2030. UHC is a path to unlocking domestic funding opportunities to build robust hepatitis services.\textsuperscript{10}

Further, UHC responses should integrate hepatitis services into immunisation, noncommunicable disease (NCD), and other health programmes to improve patient outcomes and make health systems, stronger, more efficient and effective.

**UHC RAISES THE POLITICAL WILL FOR VIRAL HEPATITIS ELIMINATION**

Current global focus on UHC presents an opportunity to keep hepatitis high on the global health agenda and bolster political will for hepatitis elimination.

The United Nations (UN) held a High-Level Meeting (HLM) on UHC in September 2023, provided countries and stakeholders an opportunity to reinvigorate progress towards delivering health for all.

Heads of state, political and health leaders, and policymakers recommitted to reaching UHC by 2030 and creating resilient and equitable health systems, with primary health care as the foundation.\textsuperscript{11}

The political declaration calls on countries to strengthen and expand hepatitis elimination programmes as part of UHC:

*Strengthen efforts to address the specific physical and mental health needs of all people as part of universal health coverage, building on commitments made in 2019, by advancing comprehensive approaches and integrated service delivery and striving to ensure that challenges are addressed and the achievements are sustained and expanded, including for: HIV/AIDS, sexually transmitted infections, tuberculosis, malaria, polio, hepatitis, neglected tropical diseases including dengue, cholera, and other emerging and re-emerging infectious diseases.*\textsuperscript{12}
CALLS TO ACTION

It is critical to keep the momentum on the goal of achieving hepatitis elimination and UHC. Hepatitis advocates must continue to push national governments to uphold the commitments they made at the meeting to hepatitis elimination and UHC.

1. **Implement hepatitis elimination as a pillar of UHC**
   Integrating viral hepatitis elimination efforts with existing services, such as primary care, HIV, tuberculosis, malaria and STI services, achieves stronger, cost-effective health services.

2. **Integrate hepatitis elimination into liver cancer services to reduce the burden of NCDs**
   Viral hepatitis infection is the most common risk factor for liver cancer, the third most common cause of cancer deaths worldwide. Hepatitis vaccination testing, treatment and care should be integrated into UHC to prevent deaths and the future costs of treating liver cancer.

3. **Include hepatitis within PMTCT programmes and deliver triple elimination**
   The hepatitis B birth dose vaccine is a key part of prevention of mother-to-child transmission (PMTCT) programmes. Triple elimination of mother-to-child transmission of HIV, syphilis and hepatitis B encourages integrated care and decreases prevalence of hepatitis.

4. **Find the missing millions**
   Nine in ten people with viral hepatitis are unaware they are living with the disease. By finding the missing millions and linking them to care, countries will drastically reduce future treatment costs and deaths from liver cancer, cirrhosis and other hepatitis-related illnesses.

5. **Increase funding for hepatitis to help achieve UHC by 2030**
   Countries can cut deaths and increase healthy life years by about 10% by 2030 by increasing funding for hepatitis prevention, testing and treatment services as part of UHC.

6. **Champion civil society in UHC responses**
   Civil society is uniquely placed to support their communities and health care systems in hepatitis elimination and UHC responses. By taking a person-centred approach to health care, with civil society playing a central role, governments can ensure that UHC policies respond to communities’ needs and that no one is left waiting.

For more information on hepatitis and UHC visit [www.worldhepatitisalliance.org/UHC](http://www.worldhepatitisalliance.org/UHC).
For more resources and information on how civil society organisations can get involved with UHC visit [www.cseonline.net](http://www.cseonline.net)