



Revolutionizing Healthcare in Iran: The Journey of Universal Health Coverage—Successes, Challenges, and the Road Ahead!

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Dear Editor-in-Chief

Universal Health Coverage (UHC) is a fundamental pillar for global health equity and sustainable development, ensuring that every individual can access essential health services without financial hardship (1). In Iran, the pursuit of UHC has been a key policy objective for decades, with significant progress made in expanding healthcare access. However, challenges such as financial constraints, disparities in service delivery, and economic pressures remain (2).

UHC Principles in Iran's Healthcare System are based on three main principles:

1. Population coverage – Ensuring healthcare access for all, particularly marginalized groups.
2. Service coverage – Providing a wide range of essential services, including prevention, treatment, rehabilitation, and palliative care.
3. Financial protection – Reducing out-of-pocket (OOP) expenses to prevent financial strain (3).

Iran has made notable strides in UHC, particularly through its Primary Health Care (PHC) network. The country's Health Transformation Plan (HTP), launched in 2014, aimed to reduce out-of-pocket (OOP) payments and expand insurance coverage (4). As a result:

Over 90% of Iran's population is now covered by some form of health insurance.

- Infant mortality dropped from 53 per 1,000 live births in 1980 to 12 in 2020.
- Maternal mortality decreased from 120 per 100,000 live births in 1990 to 16 in 2020.
- Life expectancy rose from 56 years in 1980 to over 76 years in 2022 (2, 4).

Despite these achievements, OOP expenditure remains high at around 40% of total health spending, far above the WHO-recommended 15%-20%. Many Iranians still face financial barriers when accessing care.

Key Challenges in Achieving UHC in Iran

1. Economic Sanctions and Funding Shortages – International sanctions have strained Iran's economy, limiting healthcare budgets and medical imports.
2. Urban-Rural Disparities – While Iran's rural PHC network is strong, urban areas often face overcrowded hospitals and long wait times.



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3. Aging Population & NCDs – Non-Communicable Diseases (NCDs) like diabetes and cardiovascular diseases account for over 80% of deaths, requiring costly long-term care.
4. Brain Drain of Medical Professionals – Many skilled doctors and nurses emigrate due to economic restrictions, weakening the healthcare workforce (5, 6).

Strategies to Strengthen UHC in Iran

To overcome these challenges, Iran must:

- Expand Primary Healthcare (PHC) – Strengthen community-based care, especially in underserved regions.
- Increase Public Health Financing – Shift reliance from OOP payments to tax-based or social insurance funding.
- Enhance Equity in Access – Target vulnerable groups, including low-income families, refugees, and rural populations.
- Leverage Digital Health Technologies – Telemedicine and electronic health records can improve efficiency and reach remote areas.
- Strengthen Global Collaboration – Engage with international organizations for technical support and medical supply chains (2, 6).

Iran has shown that achieving Universal Health Coverage (UHC) is possible even in the face of economic challenges. However, maintaining this progress will require improved financial protection, fair allocation of resources, and robust health systems. By focusing on primary healthcare, reducing out-of-pocket costs, and building international partnerships, Iran can ensure that all its citizens, regardless of income or location, have access to high-quality healthcare. Attaining UHC is not only a health necessity but

also a moral duty. With ongoing dedication, Iran can set an example for other countries working towards health equity in difficult circumstances.

Conflict of Interest

The authors declare that there is no conflict of interests

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