

**Without embracing new ideas from the patient community, universal health coverage will never happen.**

The launch of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) could be a big step forward in improving healthcare for billions of people worldwide. Every UN member state has pledged to achieve universal health coverage by 2030, giving themselves a fifteen year window to achieve 'healthy lives for all', and giving the rest of us a chance to hold governments to account.

Many patients are sceptical these goals will be met. Some of the SDG targets are brazenly optimistic – 'end poverty and hunger' – and may well prove to be impossible to measure. Despite this, there is a silver lining.

Whisper it quietly, but there is cause for cautious optimism this time round. Whilst history will ultimately judge governments against the goals, we are all responsible for achieving universal health coverage. Local and national decision-makers, healthcare workers, industry and, most significantly, patients themselves, can and must play their part in achieving universal health coverage.

Patients have a moral and ethical right to be involved in decisions about their care. They directly benefit or suffer from every healthcare decision made. From this central position, patients provide valuable insight which cannot be replicated by any other group. Patient insight is the lifeblood of every well-functioning health system that meets the needs of its people. Decision-makers must do all they can to embrace the patient voice.

Healthcare has advanced over the years in part because of innovative approaches which gain traction, demonstrate impact and improve the lives of patients. Healthcare will continue to march forward as patients brimming with new ideas are given platforms to share practical experience of what works. There are new examples every day. Virtual communities set up by patients are providing greater access to information and peer support than ever before, crowd-funding is helping patients pay for research that will better meet their needs, and social media is challenging stigma on a range of issues.

Innovation benefits all of us. Patients benefit from more personal, tailored care, more treatment options and better outcomes. Health providers benefit from more informed patients and better treatment adherence, systems which meet the needs of those they are designed for, and in many cases, lower costs.

Innovation within the patient community is the great secret to universal health coverage. There is no larger, latently powerful force that can improve healthcare than the creativity and determination of

# IAPO Global Patients Congress 2016

## Comment piece



patients. If neglected, UN member states will fail to achieve their goal in 14 years' time and millions of people will continue to suffer from inadequate healthcare across the world.

Governments must do everything possible to embrace patient-led innovation. They must not relegate patients to the children's table, but instead include them at every level of meaningful decision-making. They must make space for patient-led ideas and provide the necessary funding to scale up the best suggestions and solutions.

**Kawaldip Sehmi, CEO, International Alliance of Patients' Organizations.**

*150 patients' representatives from 48 countries will meet to discuss innovation in healthcare at the Global Patients Congress, London, 9-11 April. See [www.iapo.org.uk/global-patients-congress](http://www.iapo.org.uk/global-patients-congress) for more information.*

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### Notes to editors

The International Alliance of Patients' Organizations (IAPO) is a unique global alliance representing patients of all nations across all disease areas. It works to promote patient-centred healthcare around the world. With over 250 members, IAPO represents an estimated 365 million patients.

Find out more at [www.iapo.org.uk](http://www.iapo.org.uk).

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