

## IAPO Principles on Universal Health Coverage

IAPO welcomes the political commitment of international organizations and national governments to universal and equitable health coverage. However, more needs to be done to follow-through on this commitment.

Some IAPO members report a lack of commitment and inadequate funding to enable improvements in health policy and services. Members report that healthcare is often unaffordable for patients and their families and there are disparities in access to healthcare.

IAPO has worked with its members to develop the following principles on universal health coverage from a patient perspective. We believe these principles need to be the core components of health systems and we call on all governments and stakeholders to support and put into practice these principles to ensure affordable, high quality equitable access for all their citizens.

### 1. Accessibility

**All patients have the right to access the healthcare that they need, when they need it.**

- This includes access to appropriate health promotion and prevention information, preventative support services, emergency care, diagnostics and treatment, ongoing monitoring and support, specialist and community care, rehabilitative and end of life services.
- Healthcare provision should be timely and integrated.

### 2. Patient-centredness and equity

**All people, regardless of disease or condition; age, gender, race or ethnic background; sexual orientation; geographic location; socio-cultural background, economic or legal status must have fair and impartial access to quality healthcare.**

- Health systems, stakeholders and the healthcare team must recognise that the needs of different groups of people will vary, and demonstrate that different needs are taken into account when designing and delivering healthcare.
- All stakeholders must work together to understand and to meet the needs of different patients, their families and carers, including the needs of vulnerable patients.

**Patients are individuals with different needs, health and life goals.**

- Health professionals, providers and other stakeholders must put the expressed needs and goals of patients at the centre when delivering and improving healthcare. People must

have their individual needs taken into account, including support to overcome stigma and other barriers to equitable access.

- Healthcare decisions need to be made as part of a dialogue between the patient and the healthcare team.
- Stakeholders need to work together to ensure all patients understand their rights and responsibilities.

### 3. Choice and empowerment

#### **All patients have the right to know about the healthcare services that are available.**

- Patients should be able to make informed choices about the healthcare professionals they see and treatment and services they receive.
- Patients should have access to accurate, transparent and up-to-date information on healthcare providers, treatment options and costs so they are able to make informed decisions.
- Patients need to have a choice about their level of input. Patients should be asked how involved they want to be in decisions about their healthcare and what information they want to receive.
- Healthcare professionals and other stakeholders should encourage and facilitate active engagement of patients in decisions about their healthcare, in line with patients' expressed wishes and capability.

#### **Patients must be able to be meaningfully involved in healthcare decision-making and service design at the local, national, regional and global level.**

- Patients and patients' organizations need to be respected and trusted by professionals, providers and other stakeholders to participate in healthcare decision-making.
- Patients' organizations need to advocate for the patients that they represent. Training and other support can help to build the capacity and capabilities of patients and patients' organizations for example through improved health literacy and shared decision-making and other training programmes.

### 4. Quality

#### **It is not enough for all patients to have access to healthcare. Provision needs to be safe, of the highest attainable standard and include a commitment to learning and improvement. Patients need to define what constitutes quality in healthcare.**

- Patients must be treated by qualified and competent healthcare professionals, including appropriate specialists.
- All healthcare services and products (including diagnostics, medicines, medical devices and treatments) need to be safe, effective, informed by the best available medical and scientific evidence and combined with expertise for their appropriate use.

- Patient-defined quality indicators including wellness and patient experience are essential to monitoring progress and ensuring sustainable improvements.
- Robust patient feedback mechanisms should be utilised throughout health systems to continuously improve healthcare. This means that professionals, providers and other stakeholders should collect, analyse and act on quantitative and qualitative data to improve the quality of services.
- Where there is a failure to deliver healthcare of an acceptable standard, patients have the right (and should feel able) to make complaints without fear of reprisals.

## 5. Partnership and collaboration

**Patients have a moral and ethical right to play a meaningful role at all levels; in health and in other areas that can have an impact on health and wellbeing.**

- Patients must be able to engage as equal partners at all levels, from policy-making and implementation to decision-making at an individual level.
- Health systems need to actively involve patients in the design, delivery and evaluation of healthcare. Engaging patients in health policy decision-making helps to ensure that policies reflect patient and caregiver needs, preferences and capabilities.
- Patients' organizations should be engaged in policy development and delivery at the local, national and global level. These organizations and groups are a valid means for patients to be involved in healthcare decisions and policy-making, representing large numbers of diverse patients. Patients' organizations must accurately reflect the views and needs of their members and constituency.

## 6. Sustainability and the value of healthcare

**All stakeholders need to recognise the *value* of healthcare when considering investing in universal health coverage.**

- Access to high quality, equitable and affordable healthcare benefits the health of all nations and supports economic productivity.
- Governments and other healthcare stakeholders need to provide adequate funding for universal health coverage. They should consider how resources can be best allocated in order to achieve optimal societal health outcomes, ensure responsible use of medicines and limited healthcare resources, reduce waste and inefficiencies, and ensure the sustainability of health systems.
- Preventative action and support for self-management should be considered as part of investment in long-term and sustainable healthcare.
- Health systems need to continually strive to provide more effective healthcare to all patients, including to those with neglected or rare diseases. This should include innovation and improvement in: coordination of care; translational and clinical research (including

patient access to appropriate clinical trials); technology and devices, medical and surgical procedures and treatments that are up-to-date with recent scientific developments.

## **7. Accountability and transparency**

**Accountability and transparency are vital to delivering safe, effective and affordable healthcare. All stakeholders need to be held accountable on commitments they have made to implement universal health coverage, and should work collaboratively and transparently with commitment to the patients that they serve.**

- Patients must recognise their responsibilities, and be accountable for their choices and actions including committing to using health resources appropriately and understanding the impact their choices may have on their wellbeing.
- Patients and patients' organizations involvement in decision-making at every level should include representation within governance structures and processes.
- All healthcare stakeholders should be open and transparent when planning, implementing and evaluating changes to health policies and services. All healthcare stakeholders should be held accountable to ensure that funding for healthcare is spent as intended.
- All healthcare stakeholders should be open and transparent when investigating, responding to and reporting on incidents and problems in the quality of healthcare.
- All healthcare stakeholders should take responsibility for the safe handling of patient data in line with relevant legislation and best practice.

*The IAPO Principles of Universal Health Coverage Poster is available on the IAPO website.*

### **About the International Alliance of Patients' Organizations**

The International Alliance of Patients' Organizations (IAPO) is a unique global alliance representing patients of all nationalities. Everything we do is focused on promoting patient-centred healthcare. We do this by being the global voice for people who suffer from any disease, disability, illness, impairment or syndrome, and by being the focal point for local, national, regional and international patients' organizations. The essential principles guiding patient-centred healthcare are that healthcare systems are designed and services delivered so that patients' needs are answered.

**Patients are the first consideration.**