



World Health
Organization

Western Pacific

Asia Pacific health and finance ministers stress importance of universal health coverage in COVID-19 era and beyond

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Health and finance ministers from across Asia and the Pacific stressed the importance of universal health coverage (UHC) and the need for stronger collaboration to mobilize financing for health care during today's *Joint Ministers of Finance and Health Symposium on Universal Health Coverage in Asia and the Pacific: COVID-19 and Beyond*.

UHC means all people have access to quality health services where and when they need them, without suffering financial hardship. It includes the full spectrum of services needed throughout life – from health promotion to prevention, treatment, rehabilitation and palliative care – and is best based on a strong primary health care system.

Speaking during the opening of the symposium, the World Health Organization (WHO) Regional Director for the Western Pacific, Dr Takeshi Kasai, made the case for continued investments in universal health coverage.

“We have long known about the link between good health and the economy, but COVID-19 has exposed current weaknesses and gaps in our health systems – making the task of reform even more urgent,” he said. “History will judge whether we use the difficult lessons from this pandemic to build healthier, more sustainable societies and economies.”

Organized by the WHO regional offices for South-East Asia and the Western Pacific, the Asian Development Bank (ADB) and the Government of Japan, the symposium brought together health and finance leaders, international organizations, civil society and other partners to catalyse concrete actions that build on UHC commitments made at the G20 meeting in Osaka in June 2019 and at the United Nations High-level Meeting on UHC in New York in September 2019.

At today's virtual symposium, ministers of finance and ministers of health from Fiji, Indonesia, the Republic of Korea, the Philippines, Sri Lanka and Viet Nam shared strategies and lessons from navigating the coronavirus disease 2019 (COVID-19) pandemic. This included discussing the role of UHC in increasing resilience to health and economic shocks, and how investing in health can drive economic recovery given their strong interlinkage.

Over the past decade, countries in the WHO Western Pacific Region have made significant health gains and increased commitments towards UHC. But in some countries of the Region, up to 60% of people still lack coverage with essential health services, and more than 1 in 5 households spend over 10% of their income on health care. Accelerating progress towards UHC is foundational to making the Western Pacific the safest and healthiest region, as outlined in *For the Future*, WHO's vision for its work with Member States and partners in the Region in the coming years.

ADB President Masatsugu Asakawa affirmed ADB's support for UHC as a foundation of strong health systems.

"We have to build health systems where people from all walks of life, including the elderly, the poor and the vulnerable, can access health services at an affordable cost while maintaining their financial sustainability—even in aging societies that many countries in Asia and the Pacific are heading toward," he said. "In this regard, close collaboration between finance and health ministers is crucial for our member economies to provide both cost-effective, inclusive, and high-quality health interventions, underpinned by sustainable finance."

For more information

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