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ICFP: Ensuring Access and Accountability for Family Planning through Universal Health Coverage

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Universal Health Coverage (UHC) and universal access to sexual and reproductive health services figure prominently in the Sustainable Development Goals. So it is not surprising that [The International Conference on Family Planning](#) ^[5] (ICFP) maintained important focus on these topics, including through the Management Sciences for Health (MSH) auxiliary event, “[Universal Access to Family Planning and Reproductive Health: Who’s Accountable in the Post-2015 Era?](#) ^[6]” on January 27. Co-sponsored by the [Reproductive Health Supplies Coalition](#) ^[7] (RHSC) and [Family Planning 2020](#) ^[8] (FP2020), the event featured an illustrious group of panelists giving their perspectives on UHC, while exploring the intersection of health financing policy and accountability as countries move into universal access for family planning.

Jonathan D. Quick, MD, MPH, President and CEO of MSH, moderated the conversation and perhaps stated it best: “Now, more than ever, it is clear that getting family planning into national policies is critical.”

Panelists—representatives of the ministries of health of Uganda and Nigeria, international agencies and initiatives, and implementing partners—commented on progress thus far towards UHC, and specifically, incorporation of SRH services into UHC plans and strategies, as well as the challenges faced to date. It was interesting to hear the same common requirements for success—leadership and commitment, funding UHC, and data—mentioned by all panelists, regardless of their role in UHC implementation.

Leadership and commitment

National governments have an obvious role in leading implementation of UHC efforts, but their role as leaders also extends to ensuring that accountability frameworks are built into UHC implementation strategies. Likewise, international agencies and global initiatives must provide leadership in the global community on accountability for UHC both in terms of providing guidance as to what that means at various levels, and especially in terms of [practical approaches to ensuring accountability](#) ^[9]. Finally, implementing partners have a role to play in leading civil society to hold governments accountable for ensuring equitable access to SRH services.

Ensuring universal access to family planning and reproductive health requires the commitment of all stakeholders. Governments must commit both to being accountable and to holding others accountable for the established goals of the UHC efforts. Similarly, international agencies and global initiatives must commit to the same. Finally, civil society organizations also must commit to ensuring that their constituents understand their rights and who is accountable for what in their settings.

Financing UHC

Funding for UHC in general, and more specifically for implementation of accountability frameworks, was raised as a concern by all panelists. Implementation of UHC strategies will likely require additional investment and all stakeholders should be accountable for ensuring cost-effectiveness and cost-efficiencies in investments. Said Dr. Quick: “If a country just wants a family planning service, the more a country’s commitment, the more it is going to cost. But if you are supporting the whole health system, family planning pays for itself.”

Data

Finally, there was a general recognition that without visible, transparent data there is little hope of holding anyone accountable for outcomes. To guarantee universal access to family planning and reproductive health, effective processes and systems for acquiring, analyzing, reporting, and using data for decision making are essential.

There continues to be much debate regarding the best way to ensure that sexual and reproductive health rights and family planning are included as countries forge ahead in pursuit of UHC, but the benefits of their inclusion are undeniable. Anyone who cares about sexual and reproductive health rights [10] and access to family planning needs to be involved in these discussions from step one.

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Related

- Fact Sheet: Sexual and Reproductive Health in the Context of Universal Health Coverage [10]
- Universal Health Coverage Day 2015: Ensuring Access to Reproductive Health Supplies, A Systematic Review [12]
- Read more from MSH staff at ICFP [13]

ICFP [14], Family Planning [15], health financing [16], Reproductive Health Supplies Coalition [17], #FP2020 [18]

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