The quality of health care services is critical to achieving effective universal health coverage (UHC). Resilient health services require quality as a foundation. The success and value of UHC depends on its ability to provide safe, efficient, quality services to all people, everywhere. There is an urgent need to place quality care at the centre of global, regional and country level action, in order to progress towards effective UHC.

Quality of health service delivery is relevant to all parts of WHO’s work. We are in a new era where the quality of health service delivery takes centre stage in pursuit of the health-related sustainable development goals (SDGs) and in particular SDG 3.8. It is with this priority in mind that WHO has established a specific unit to focus on quality UHC.

The WHO Department of Service Delivery and Safety (SDS) supports countries to move their health systems towards UHC, through increased access to safe, quality, effective, integrated and people-centred services. The urgency of the Ebola response, as well as the growing recognition of the need for a focused effort on UHC and the linkages with quality of care, have resulted in WHO committing specifically to addressing quality UHC.

The WHO UHC & Quality unit is working across a number of inter-related areas, of immediate relevance to Member States.

WHO’s commitment focuses on:

1. Country engagement and strategic frameworks for quality UHC

This area of work includes:

- supporting countries to develop national quality policy and strategy in the context of UHC;
- ensuring strong quality-UHC convergence in the development of WHO technical resources on UHC;
- launching a Global Learning Laboratory for Quality UHC to share knowledge, challenge ideas and spark innovations;
- developing action frameworks to ensure that targeted improvement efforts have an enhanced impact through closer alignment with quality UHC;
- establishing a WHO Taskforce on Quality UHC – bringing multiple technical programmes together;
- engaging with global partners to facilitate a coherent dialogue around quality UHC.
2. Health service resilience

This area provides technical support to Member States as well as the wider WHO and UN system, on the delivery of essential health services when challenged by a shock. The aim is to ensure that shocks are understood and addressed within the context of the entire health system, not in isolation.

The key is to better link health services with the health security agenda in terms of prevention, preparedness, response and recovery. The significant experience of Ebola recovery is being used to shape this work. Initial work is focusing on:

- defining the basics of health service resilience and the critical linkages with quality UHC;
- strengthening the link between disaster response and post-shock needs assessment, in terms of essential health services;
- compiling a package of critical tools and resources from across WHO for Member States to use during recovery;
- looking at the relationship between strengthening surveillance, preparedness, disaster risk management and the delivery of health services;
- supporting systematic community engagement mechanisms that are embedded within national systems and support health service resilience;
- Supporting information and communication technology (ICT) for the reactivation of essential health services and health service resilience.

3. Partnerships for improvement

This area grounds efforts on frontline realities and provides a platform for sustainability.

- The African Partnerships for Patient Safety (APPS) approach continues to be used as a foundation for a wider effort on twinning partnerships for improvement within the context of UHC. Bidirectional technical exchange between frontline health workers is central to the application of such twinning efforts across countries;
- The ASSIST partnership for improvement is providing an opportunity to strengthen quality of care within the context of UHC in a number of countries;
- Partnership with the Johns Hopkins Armstrong Institute for Patient safety and Quality is being strengthened and built upon for further quality efforts globally;
- Linguistic partnerships are being harnessed based on close engagement with health information networks;
- Partnership innovations contribute to the increasing recognition of global innovation flow between different countries with a particular emphasis on south-to-north and south-to-south transfer.

In addition, two further cross-cutting areas of focus are essential public health functions and migration & health. Both of these are seen as priority areas for action and provide an opportunity to systematically work towards quality universal health coverage.

The common principle underpinning all areas of work is its immediate relevance to Member States in building strong health services that meet the growing demands of their respective populations, to achieve quality UHC.