



DISCUSSION TOPIC:

What advances have taken place since the Declaration of Astana's commitment to Primary Healthcare and Universal Health Coverage?

Authors: Viviana Martinez-Bianchi, Anna Stavdal

Why this is important:

The Astana Declaration reaffirmed the importance of Primary Health Care (PHC) as the foundation of achieving Universal Health Coverage (UHC) and the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). It highlighted the essential role of PHC in promoting health, preventing disease, and addressing health inequities. The declaration provided a roadmap for countries, global organizations, and health systems to strengthen a commitment to comprehensive and integrated primary health care services while recognizing the role of communities and individuals in achieving better health outcomes. It encouraged investment on workforce development, infrastructure, and technology to ensure the delivery of comprehensive and quality primary care services, while also addressing social determinants of health, and creating systems that are equitable, accessible, and responsive to the needs of vulnerable populations. The declaration called for increased international and intersectoral collaboration and partnerships, and investments in primary healthcare to achieve better health for all.

What We Think We Know:

GLOBAL

In October 2018 the World Health Organization (WHO) in partnership with UNICEF and the Ministry of Health Care of the Republic of Kazakhstan held the Global Conference on Primary Healthcare in Astana, Kazakhstan, on the 40th Anniversary of the Declaration of Alma Ata. The conference resulted in the adoption of the Astana Declaration.^{1,2}

- The conference aimed to renew commitment to primary healthcare as the foundation of universal health coverage and to explore ways to strengthen primary healthcare around the world. The Astana Declaration reaffirmed the importance of primary healthcare in achieving health for all. The declaration emphasized the need for strong political commitment, increased investment, and multisectoral collaboration to strengthen primary healthcare systems globally. It proposed improving access to essential health services, promoting health equity, addressing social determinants of health, enhancing health workforce development, and leveraging technology and innovation in primary healthcare.
- The commitments of the Declaration of Astana were later supported by the World Health Assembly (WHA) Resolution WHA72/2, May 24, 2019.³

In September 2019, the United Nations hosted a High-Level Meeting for Universal health Coverage and signed a Political Declaration "Universal health coverage: moving together to build a healthier world".^{4,5}

- With this declaration heads of state reaffirmed their commitment to health as a human right, recognizing the significance of primary healthcare in achieving the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), and to ensuring that everyone has access to essential and quality health services. Member states recognized the critical need for strong health systems which provide primary health care services that are integrated, comprehensive, and people-centered, and address health promotion, prevention, treatment, and palliative care. The political declaration, in addition, suggests that efforts need collective action and partnerships between governments, civil society, academia and other stakeholders, to work together toward the common goal of improving health for all and accelerate progress as a shared responsibility.
- Evident in many of the conversations, was the confusion between primary health care (PHC) and primary care (PC). In 2021, WHO responded with a guidance page on PHC, and with the identification of three strategic priorities to strengthen PHC worldwide⁶:
 - Providing a 'one-stop' mechanism for PHC implementation support to Member States, tailored to country context and priorities,
 - Producing PHC-oriented evidence and innovation, with a sharper focus those who are marginalized,
 - Promoting PHC renewal through policy leadership, advocacy and strategic partnerships.
- WHO has supported the Astana Declaration with a series of technical documents to guide policymakers:
 - A vision for primary health care in the 21st century. Towards universal health coverage and the Sustainable Development Goals. Published December 2018⁷
 - The Primary Health Care Measurement Framework and Indicators, launched in 2022, by WHO together with UNICEF⁸
 - From 2015 to 2022 the Primary Health Care Performance Initiative, (founded by Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation, in collaboration with the WHO and the World Bank, in collaboration with Ariadne Labs and Results for Development, UNICEF and the Global Fund, attempted to “transform the global state of primary health care, striving to help create a world where strong primary health care is the reality, not the exception”, and created a website in support of transformation [ImprovingPHC.org](https://www.improvingphc.org), guiding improvement, measuring and engaging. PHCPI also worked with governments and partners to advocate for and advance PHC.⁹
 - Provides secretariat support to the UHC2030 global platform and space for multiple stakeholders to connect, and a mission to “create a movement for accelerating equitable and sustainable progress towards universal health coverage (UHC)”.¹⁰
 - Global Alliance for Vaccines and Immunization (GAVI)- Preventive illness through vaccines distribution, supporting worldwide immunization programs promotes universal access to vaccines worldwide.
- The COVID-19 Pandemic highlighted the significance and need for strong primary care within primary health care.^{11 12 13}
- Discussion continued at WHA in 2021, 2022, and 2023 with conversations of renewed commitments. Yet not much as truly advanced at each country level to support PHC and UHC.
- In May 2022, WONCA submitted a Constituency Statement on Global Strategy on Human Resources for Health: Workforce 2030, at the 75th World Health Assembly, emphasizing the central work of women as PHC workers, and the need for support for the workforce¹⁴

- At WHA 2023, WONCA delivered three constituency statements related to multiple agenda items, including [item 15.1 on Strengthening WHO preparedness for and response to health emergencies](#); [item 16.1 on Well-being and health promotion](#); and [item 13.1 on Universal health coverage: “Reorienting health systems to primary health care as a resilient foundation for universal health coverage and Preparations for a high-level meeting of the United Nations General Assembly on universal health coverage”](#).^{15 16 17} All three statements related to PHC for UHC.
- WONCA’S strategic priorities in the work with WHO have refocused on:
 - Strengthening WONCA regional links with the WHO to map and build on these.
 - Harnessing the expertise of our working parties and special interest groups to provide technical support, and thereby ensuring PHC perspectives in all policies.
 - Focusing our clinical expertise to support WHO initiatives to improve non-communicable disease (NCD) outcomes.
 - Establishing a more formal collaboration between professional organizations in primary care.

The United States could contribute to international primary health care efforts in several ways:

- **Financial Support:** Funding of programs that focus on primary health care instead of silo programs that fund disease-specific areas, funding training of primary healthcare workers, infrastructure development for primary care clinics in most marginalized areas (both urban and rural), and funding international organizations that promote Family Medicine and Primary health care. Connecting with global primary health care organizations, such as WONCA.
- **Technical Expertise:** Providing training and mentorship programs led by experts in comprehensive PHC, collaborating with international partners who are on the ground to enhance the capacity of local health care systems, making sure that when these efforts are put in place, that these efforts are respectful and inclusive of local family doctors and general practitioners and their member organizations, and are created with local input.
- **Research and Innovation:** Support research initiatives that contribute to primary health care improvements, and to strengthening inter-professional and interdisciplinary teamwork.
- **PHC Diplomacy:** advocate for, and emphasize PHC as a global priority, harnessing support for PHC in international forums and summits, as well as coordinating efforts to address global health inequities.
- **Humanitarian assistance** during natural disasters, public health emergencies and pandemics that is inclusive of PHC.

Questions for Group Consideration:

1. Has the Declaration of Astana contributed to advancing UHC? What measures have been taken to ensure access to PHC services for all?
2. What progress has been made in implementing the principles and commitments outlined in the Declaration of Astana, and reaffirmed by the political declaration signed at the UN?
3. To what extent has the declaration led to improvements in health systems, particularly in strengthening PHC infrastructure, and workforce development?
4. Have efforts been made to reduce disparities and improve health outcomes for marginalized and vulnerable populations?
5. Has the declaration fostered meaningful community engagement, and patient and community empowerment in health-decision making processes?

6. To what extent has the Astana Declaration fostered collaboration and partnerships among countries, intranational organizations, civil society and the private sector?
7. How are the outcomes and impact of the Astana Declaration being measured and evaluated?

REFERENCES:

1. Global Conference on Primary Health Care <https://www.who.int/teams/primary-health-care/conference>
2. The Declaration of Astana, WHO <https://www.who.int/docs/default-source/primary-health/declaration/gcphc-declaration.pdf>
3. World Health Assembly Resolution 72/2, May 2019 https://apps.who.int/gb/ebwha/pdf_files/WHA72/A72_R2-en.pdf
4. United Nations' High level meeting on Universal Health Coverage <https://www.un.org/pga/73/event/universal-health-coverage/>
5. United Nations Political Declaration of the High-level Meeting on Universal Health Coverage "Universal health coverage: moving together to build a healthier world" (initial draft) <https://www.un.org/pga/73/wp-content/uploads/sites/53/2019/07/FINAL-draft-UHC-Political-Declaration.pdf> and signed declaration <https://documents-dds-ny.un.org/doc/UNDOC/GEN/N19/311/84/PDF/N1931184.pdf?OpenElement>
6. WHO Fact Sheets Detail Primary Health Care <https://www.who.int/news-room/fact-sheets/detail/primary-health-care#:~:text=Scaling%20up%20primary%20health%20care%20%28PHC%29%20interventions%20across,for%20a%20more%20comprehensive%20package%20of%20health%20services.>
7. **A vision for primary health care in the 21st century.** Towards universal health coverage and the Sustainable Development Goals. Published December 2018. Technical document <https://www.who.int/publications/i/item/WHO-HIS-SDS-2018.15>
8. **Primary health care measurement framework and indicators: monitoring health systems through a primary health care lens.** Geneva: World Health Organization and the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF), 2022. Licence: CC BY-NC-SA 3.0 IGO. <https://www.who.int/publications/i/item/9789240044210>
9. PHCPI website <https://www.improvingphc.org/>
10. UHC2030 <https://www.uhc2030.org/>
11. OECD Policy responses to coronavirus <https://www.oecd.org/coronavirus/policy-responses/strengthening-the-frontline-how-primary-health-care-helps-health-systems-adapt-during-the-covid-19-pandemic-9a5ae6da/>
12. Role of primary care in the COVID-19 response Interim guidance by WHO. Revised and republished as of 9 April 2021 <https://apps.who.int/iris/bitstream/handle/10665/331921/Primary-care-COVID-19-eng.pdf?sequence=5&isAllowed=y>
13. Rawaf S, Allen LN, Stigler FL, Kringos D, Quezada Yamamoto H, van Weel C; Global Forum on Universal Health Coverage and Primary Health Care. Lessons on the COVID-19 pandemic, for and by primary care professionals worldwide. *Eur J Gen Pract.* 2020 Dec;26(1):129-133. doi: 10.1080/13814788.2020.1820479. PMID: 32985278; PMCID: PMC7534357
14. WONCA position statements 2022 <https://www.globalfamilydoctor.com/AboutWonca/PositionStatements.aspx>
15. WONCA position statements 2023 <https://www.globalfamilydoctor.com/News/WHA76ConstituencyStatementonStrengtheningWHOpreparednessfor.aspx>

<https://www.globalfamilydoctor.com/News/WHA76ConstituencyStatementonUniversalhealthcoverage.aspx>

<https://www.globalfamilydoctor.com/News/WHA76AgendaItem161Well-beingandhealthpromotion.aspx>