

UHC High-Level Forum 2025: a renewed joint commitment to universal health coverage through the UHC Knowledge Hub



Universal health coverage (UHC) means that all people have access to the full range of quality health services they need, when and where they need them, without financial hardship. A matter of human rights and equity, UHC also underpins inclusive and sustainable economic growth by supporting a healthy and productive workforce, and contributes to better education, poverty eradication, stronger social protection, and equality for all—critical foundations for human development. Japan's achievement of UHC in 1961, which contributed to social stability and rapid economic growth, shows the importance of promoting UHC at an early stage of economic development.¹ The Ebola virus disease outbreaks in west Africa in 2014–16 and the COVID-19 pandemic from 2020 served as sharp reminders that UHC is also essential for health system resilience and public health emergency preparedness.

However, there are challenges with advancing UHC in many countries. In 2023, 4.6 billion people lacked access to essential health services, and in 2022, 2.1 billion people experienced financial hardship² due to out-of-pocket health spending, with the poorest and most vulnerable disproportionately affected. To address these gaps, countries need to improve the quality of health services and protect people from excessive financial burdens by strengthening health financing systems.

Against this background, the Japanese Ministry of Finance, the Japanese Ministry of Health, Labour and Welfare, the World Bank Group (WBG), and WHO convened the first UHC High-Level Forum (the Forum) in Tokyo, Japan, on Dec 6, 2025, where we jointly launched the UHC Knowledge Hub^{3–5} and reaffirmed a shared commitment to progressing towards UHC. The co-hosts and the participants of the Forum highlighted the importance of finance–health collaboration, country-level national actions, and the UHC Knowledge Hub, among other areas.

Finance–health collaboration is crucial for progress on UHC. Close collaboration between ministries of health and finance is instrumental in strengthening health financing systems because it facilitates domestic resources mobilisation and the efficient use of funds through robust public financial management. The

Government of Japan has long promoted finance–health collaboration, convening the first-ever Joint Finance and Health Ministerial Session in 2019 under its G20 Presidency and reinforcing this partnership during its G7 Presidency in 2023.^{6–8} The establishment of the UHC Knowledge Hub and the convening of the Forum mark a new milestone in strengthening finance–health collaboration.

With regard to country-level national actions, the need to shift towards more country-led and self-reliant health systems has grown substantially amid fiscal constraints in high-income countries and increasingly complex multilateral cooperation. In this context, the commitment by 15 countries that launched National Health Compacts—nationally led visions supported by partners—at the Forum is commendable, with more countries expected to follow. These compacts outline how countries will strengthen primary health care by using digital technology and working with both public and private health providers. The compacts will help build equitable and sustainable health financing systems, promoting progress towards the Sustainable Development Goals target on UHC and the WBG's target of reaching 1.5 billion people with quality, affordable health services.^{9,10} Collaboration with partners and private sectors will complement strong national ownership.

The implementation of country-led UHC initiatives requires strengthening the capacities of the finance and health authorities responsible for their execution. In this regard, the UHC Knowledge Hub^{3–5} has a crucial role in providing capacity building on health financing

Published Online
January 21, 2026
[https://doi.org/10.1016/S0140-6736\(26\)00096-6](https://doi.org/10.1016/S0140-6736(26)00096-6)



for senior officials from finance and health ministries in developing countries. The training programmes are co-designed with participating countries, emphasising country ownership and country-specific needs. We welcome the participation of eight countries (Cambodia, Egypt, Ethiopia, Ghana, Indonesia, Kenya, Nigeria, and the Philippines) in the inaugural training programme and look forward to engaging with other countries in the future.

The UHC Knowledge Hub will collaborate, when relevant, with regional development banks, the Japan International Cooperation Agency, the private sector, philanthropic organisations, civil society, academia, and other relevant stakeholders to support participating countries in implementing health financing policies, including through technical and financial assistance. The UHC Knowledge Hub will also serve as a key driver for advocacy to strengthen political momentum towards achieving UHC. In this way the UHC Knowledge Hub will have an important role in developing global health architecture, combining advocacy, training programmes, and implementation support.

Going forward, the Forum will be pivotal in shaping global discussions on the Post-2030 Agenda, in view of the UN General Assembly High-Level Meeting on UHC to be held in 2027, among other relevant meetings. The Government of Japan together with the WBG and WHO will convene the Forum regularly in Tokyo to review progress on the UHC Knowledge Hub and to identify ways to improve its activities, while providing guidance and support for the implementation of country-led initiatives such as National Health Compacts.

Furthermore, the Forum will foster collaboration across diverse stakeholders and sustain momentum towards achieving UHC.

KS is the Minister of Finance and UK is the Minister of Health, Labour and Welfare for the Government of Japan. AB is the President of the World Bank Group. TAG is the Director-General of WHO. We declare no competing interests.

Katayama Satsuki, *Ueno Kenichiro, Ajay Banga, Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus
whomhlw@mhlw.go.jp

Ministry of Finance (KS) and Ministry of Health, Labour and Welfare (UK), Government of Japan, Tokyo, Japan; World Bank Group, Washington, DC, USA (AB); World Health Organization, Geneva, Switzerland (TAG)

- 1 Reich MR, Shibuya K, Takemi K, et al. 50 years of pursuing a healthy society in Japan. *Lancet* 2011; **378**: 1051–53.
- 2 WHO, International Bank for Reconstruction and Development, The World Bank. Tracking universal health coverage: 2025 global monitoring report. 2025. <https://www.who.int/publications/i/item/9789240117815> (accessed Jan 8, 2026).
- 3 Ministry of Health, Labour and Welfare, Government of Japan. UHC Knowledge Hub. Country report. 2025. <https://www.mhlw.go.jp/content/001585374.pdf> (accessed Jan 8, 2026).
- 4 WHO. Universal Health Coverage (UHC) High-level Forum. Dec 6, 2025. [https://www.who.int/news-room/events/detail/2025/12/06/default-calendar/universal-health-coverage-\(uhc\)-high-level-forum](https://www.who.int/news-room/events/detail/2025/12/06/default-calendar/universal-health-coverage-(uhc)-high-level-forum) (accessed Jan 8, 2026).
- 5 World Bank Group. UHC Knowledge Hub: supporting sustainable financing for universal health coverage. Oct 23, 2025. <https://www.worldbank.org/en/programs/health-works/brief/uhc-knowledge-hub> (accessed Jan 8, 2026).
- 6 Aso T. Crucial role of finance ministry in achieving universal health coverage. *Lancet* 2017; **390**: 2415–17.
- 7 Kishida F. Human security and universal health coverage: Japan's vision for the G7 Hiroshima Summit. *Lancet* 2023; **401**: 246–47.
- 8 Ezoe S, Hashimoto J, Nishida Y, et al. Health outcomes of the G7 Hiroshima Summit: breaking the cycle of panic and neglect and achieving UHC. *Lancet* 2023; **401**: 2091–93.
- 9 WHO. Universal health coverage (UHC), SDG Target 3.8. 2026. <https://www.who.int/data/gho/data/themes/theme-details/GHO/universal-health-coverage> (accessed Jan 20, 2026).
- 10 World Bank Group. Advancing the World Bank Group Goal: reaching 1.5 billion people with quality, affordable health services by 2030. Dec 9, 2025. <https://www.worldbank.org/en/news/feature/2025/12/09/advancing-the-world-bank-group-goal-reaching-1-5-billion-people-with-quality-affordable-health-services-by-2030> (accessed Jan 20, 2026).