

WHA Statement

Geneva, 19 May 2019

It is an honour for me to present the Commonwealth Statement in my capacity as the Chair of the 2019 Commonwealth Health Ministers Meeting, which was held in Geneva on Sunday 19 May 2019. We are 53 countries representing 2.4 billion people from all the regions of the world. The Commonwealth includes both advanced economies and developing countries. Thirty-one of our members are small states, many of which are island nations.

The theme of the meeting was ‘Universal Health Coverage: Reaching the unreached, ensuring no one is left behind’, which aligns fully with the 72nd World Health Assembly Theme “Universal health coverage: leaving no one behind” and ties in with WHO’s strategic priorities elaborated in its 13th Programme of Work, 2019-2023.

Commonwealth Health Ministers, emphasising the global commitment to ensure that no one is left behind, noted that the global community is almost a third of the way towards the 2030 SDG deadline and were concerned that half of the world’s population still did not have full coverage of essential health services and almost 100 million people are still being pushed into extreme poverty (living on \$1:90 or less per day) because of health care expenses. We noted that too often women and children, people with disabilities, older persons and other vulnerable groups, are left behind in accessing comprehensive health care across their life course especially at critical times in their lives.

Ministers noted the progress made since 2018, but were concerned that 40% of pregnant women were still not receiving early antenatal care, two-thirds of women experiencing gender-based violence were not accessing any services, and many did not have access to sexual and reproductive health services.

We also highlighted the impact of poor mental health on adults and whole communities and were concerned that 1.1 billion people were living with mental health challenges and substance abuse disorders, and that major depressive disorders ranked in the top 10 causes of ill health in all but 4 countries worldwide. Ministers acknowledged the impact of mental health challenges and psychosocial disabilities on young people, noting with concern the increasing prevalence of mental health challenges among adolescents, and the level of violence they face in different parts of the Commonwealth.

Ministers recognised progress made by a number of Commonwealth countries in strengthening high-level political commitment to achieving UHC; innovation in expanding national health schemes to promote inclusion and ensuring that the unreached are reached and no one is left behind, as well as engaging communities in planning and delivery of interventions to accelerate UHC and considering health in all policies. Ministers also noted the need to increase numbers and distribution of health workers with the right competencies. We recognised primary healthcare close to the community as a gateway to leaving no one behind.

I invite member countries to view the full ministerial statement that is available on the Commonwealth Secretariat Website.