

Advancing Universal Health Coverage



Advancing Health Coverage for All People

The call for universal health coverage (UHC) doesn't just represent a policy goal—it's a movement. UHC ensures that "all people obtain the health services they need without suffering financial hardship when paying for them."ⁱ Helping governments around the globe fulfill that promise is a major priority for Abt Associates.

The importance of UHC is reflected in the United Nations' (U.N.) Sustainable Development Goals, which call for universal health coverage by 2030 in the form of financial risk protection; access to quality essential health care services; and access to safe, effective, quality and affordable essential medicines and vaccines for all.ⁱⁱ All 193 U.N. Member States stand behind this ambitious target.

Despite global attention, however, recent evidence makes clear that achieving UHC will be a marathon, not a sprint. Using newly created indicators to measure progress toward UHC, the World Health Organization (WHO) and the World Bank in 2017 reported that at least half of the world's 7.3 billion people still do not receive the health services they need. Further, over 800 million people spend at least 10 percent of their household budget on health care, and some 100 million people fall into extreme poverty each year as a result of paying for care.ⁱ According to the WHO, achieving UHC will require countries to focus on at least three factors: protecting people from financial risk, strengthening the quality of health services and ensuring equity in access to health services.ⁱⁱⁱ

Abt brings deep experience and proven technical ability to help countries advance in all of these spheres. Through multiple projects, we collaborate with governments, the private sector, civil society and other local stakeholders to create meaningful results. Abt emphasizes a systems approach to expand **financial protection** from catastrophic health expenditures so populations have **equitable** access to high **quality health services**. Our technical assistance promotes country ownership and sustainability and builds evidence to enable local and global learning and adaptation.

Abt advances **financial protection, quality services** and **equitable access** to essential care

With our support:

- **Ethiopia** has enrolled 14.5 million people in community-based health insurance
- **Nigeria** has reduced stockout rates for essential drugs from 96% to 12% in five states
- **Papua New Guinea** has increased vaccination rates in children under the age of one by over 20% in North, Middle and South Fly Districts ¹

Financial Protection

Abt's systems approach ensures that a country's health financing activities are linked to broader health system goals. For example, we design and implement:

- Revenue collection mechanisms that generate **resources for the health sector**.
- Pooling mechanisms that spread risk among participants, thus **preventing catastrophic health expenditures for households**; and
- Purchasing schemes that improve **health care efficiency and quality**.

These strategies promote efficiency and sustainability within financing mechanisms, enabling partners to provide wide-reaching and effective financial protection.^{iv}

In **Ethiopia**, Abt is supporting the government's implementation of health care financing reforms at all government and health facility levels. Through USAID's Health Sector Financing Reform (HSFR) and Health Finance and Governance (HFG) projects, Abt has significantly expanded Ethiopians' access to comprehensive health insurance. Working with our technical experts, Ethiopia has doubled the rates of health service utilization in 318 *woredas* (districts), reduced out-of-pocket health expenditures for the national population by 4 percent, and increased enrollment in health insurance from 1 to 18 percent. As of 2018, 14.5 million Ethiopians had enrolled in community-based health insurance. These successes

prompted the rollout of a national health insurance program targeting 80 percent of the informal labor sector that will continue to be supported by Abt through USAID/Ethiopia's new Health Finance Improvement program.

In **Senegal**, Abt has strengthened critical foundations for implementing sustainable UHC reforms with USAID funding. Our contributions include drafting a national UHC bill, developing a framework to increase private sector involvement in *mutuelles* (community-level health insurance programs) and facilitating political and technical dialogue to help the government of Senegal expand health-related financial risk protection for the population. With Abt's help, the government has developed a strategic UHC plan and set up the *Agence de la Couverture Maladie Universelle* (UHC Agency). Our technical assistance contributed to the creation of 101 community health insurance schemes and the introduction of government subsidies for 180 community health insurance schemes. Abt is currently working closely with the UHC Agency on health service costing to ensure the financial viability of the financial protection schemes that will advance UHC.^v

In **Ghana**, Abt worked through the HFG project to strengthen the capacity—and institutional processes of—the National Health Insurance Agency to use evidence to make decisions; ensure the agency's financial sustainability; and make it a more efficient, equitable and strategic purchaser of quality services.

In **Vietnam**, Abt supports government efforts to expand financial protection so that people living with HIV can access comprehensive HIV services. The USAID Sustainable Financing for HIV activity increases the enrollment of antiretroviral therapy patients in Vietnam's national social health insurance system while generating evidence for coverage of HIV preventive services.

In the **Democratic Republic of the Congo**, Abt leads the USAID Integrated Health Program to help the Ministry of Health develop and implement innovative reforms to increase financial protection and access to sustainable health insurance mechanisms nationwide.

Quality

Improving the quality of patient-centered health services is at the heart of the promise of UHC.^{vi} In support of national quality strategies, Abt works across sectors at the national, community and facility levels to implement sustainable, evidence-based quality improvement measures.

In **Nigeria**, Abt strengthened national quality control measures through the Partnership for Transforming Health Systems 2 (PATHS2) project, funded by the UK Department for International Development. Policies, plans and systems strengthened by PATHS2 dramatically reduced stockouts of essential drugs in five states—from 96 percent to 12 percent. At the same time, the programs increased access to quality maternal, newborn and child health services for over 140,000 people. Through the Sustaining Health Outcomes through the Private Sector (SHOPS) Plus project, Abt is establishing private provider networks to detect, diagnose, treat and follow up on tuberculosis cases. These networks include not only clinical providers but also proprietary patent medicine vendors, community pharmacists and private laboratories—all of which often serve as the first point of contact for Nigerians seeking health care. SHOPS Plus also collaborates with other USAID partners in Nigeria, enhancing provider training and supervision systems to improve clinician skills and attitudes.

In **Tanzania**, SHOPS Plus is developing for USAID a harmonized approach to improve practical training and clinical mentorship opportunities for nursing and midwifery students.

Abt is implementing similar approaches in Uganda through the USAID-funded **Uganda Voucher Plus** Activity, which subsidizes maternal, child and newborn health services while strengthening private providers' capacity to deliver quality services and participate in health financing mechanisms. The project provides clinical mentorship and business management training while facilitating public-private partnerships to promote cohesion and quality in the Ugandan health system. To date, the project has provided over 100,000 facility-based deliveries for women in Uganda.

Equity

Advancing equitable access to health services requires identifying and minimizing barriers to services for vulnerable, underserved populations and increasing the supply of and demand for essential services. Through innovative partnerships, targeted service delivery and public-private sector collaboration, Abt has increased access to health services for vulnerable people around the world.

Under the North Fly Health Services Development Program and the Community Mine Continuation Agreement Middle and South Fly Health Program, Abt is leveraging the power of public-private partnerships to improve access to basic health services for remote populations in **Papua New Guinea**. The work, funded by Ok Tedi Mining Limited and Ok Tedi Development Foundation, has brought together local governments, church and other non-government religious groups and health providers in a collaborative effort to expand the reach of the Papua New Guinea health system to improve health outcomes for isolated communities. The projects have significantly increased the percentage of children under the age of one who have received three doses of the DTP-HepB-Hib pentavalent vaccine—from 7 percent to 30 percent in the Western Province.

Abt also is working to improve reproductive and child health outcomes for Syrian refugees living in **Jordan**. We lead USAID's flagship Health Service Delivery activity, through which we promote public, nongovernmental and private sector collaboration. Together, we're expanding access to—and the availability of—integrated health services that are particularly critical to refugee women and children and improving health-seeking behavior within this vulnerable group.

In **Nepal**, Abt works to improve health outcomes for the most marginalized and disadvantaged groups through the USAID Strengthening Systems for Better Health Activity. Abt provides technical, financial and logistical assistance to government agencies to address social, cultural and financial barriers. By breaking down these barriers, we're increasing equitable access to health services.

Building on Abt's nearly 20 years of experience in **Zambia**, the USAID-funded Systems for Better Health (SBH) project supports the Zambian Ministry of Health's efforts to provide equitable access to cost-effective, high-quality family planning, HIV/AIDS, maternal, newborn, child health and nutrition services in five high-priority provinces. By strengthening linkages between communities and health facilities, SBH has enrolled over 1,300 HIV-positive infants, children and adolescents in antiretroviral therapy and maintained 95 percent treatment compliance within this group.

Abt Makes Change Happen

Abt's implementation of UHC activities is grounded in our decades of experience and learning and supported by proven tools that ensure change happens efficiently and intelligently. Abt understands that achieving UHC is an inherently political process, which is why we use the Political Economy Analysis tool to identify political, economic, social and cultural factors that drive or impede reforms and design programming in accordance with the findings. To learn precisely where a country's health system needs improvement and to inform data-driven planning, we employ the latest version of the Health System Assessment Approach—a powerful tool created by the Abt-led HFG Project together with USAID's Office of Health Systems. To gain an in-depth understanding of a country's private sector and how it might best contribute to health sector improvement, Abt uses the Private Sector Assessment tool. And to continue learning, adapting and boosting our impact throughout the implementation of a project, Abt undertakes rapid learning assessments to inform immediate decision making.

Ability to implement. Thinking politically. Working collaboratively. Continually learning and adapting. These are the strengths and practices that have made Abt a valued partner to over 40 countries on the global journey to UHC.

ⁱ Tracking universal health coverage: 2017 global monitoring report. World Health Organization and International Bank for Reconstruction and Development / The World Bank; 2017. License: CC BY-NC-SA 3.0 IGO. https://www.who.int/healthinfo/universal_health_coverage/report/2017/en/

ⁱⁱ Sustainable Development Goals Knowledge Platform. The United Nations <https://sustainabledevelopment.un.org/sdg3>

ⁱⁱⁱ What is health financing for universal coverage? World Health Organization. Accessed March 2019.

https://www.who.int/health_financing/universal_coverage_definition/en/

^{iv} <https://hfgproject.org>

^v End-of-Project Report for Health Systems Strengthening Component, 2011-2016. USAID Senegal; 2017.

^{vi} <https://hfgproject.org>

Abt Associates is an engine for social impact, dedicated to moving people from vulnerability to security. Harnessing the power of data and our experts' grounded insights, we provide research, consulting and technical services globally in the areas of health, environmental and social policy, technology and international development.



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