



# The Journey Towards Universal Health Coverage in Cameroon:

## *Forging a Path to Equitable Health Care Access for All*



Photo credit:  
The Ministry of Public Health and  
Timothe Chevaux, MSH

The high proportion of health services that are paid for out of pocket in Cameroon—around **70%**, according to the national health accounts<sup>1</sup>—represents a significant barrier for many Cameroonians in accessing health care.

These costs often lead to financial hardship, hinder the uptake of health services, and negatively impact health outcomes, particularly for vulnerable populations such as people living with HIV (PLHIV).

Since 2015, the country's government has initiated a process for establishing a functional universal health coverage (UHC) system to ensure access to high-quality health care services for Cameroonians while reducing household health expenses. This process was further reinforced when, on December 31, 2017, the President of Cameroon publicly declared the country's commitment to guaranteeing affordable and equitable access to quality health care for all.

April 12, 2023, marked a historic achievement as the Cameroon Government, through the Ministry of Public Health (MoPH), officially launched Phase I of UHC in the Mandjou area of Bertoua, East region. With this initiative, the MoPH is pleased to provide a continuum of essential health services to promote health-seeking behaviors, lessen the associated financial burden for families, and support all Cameroonians in leading healthy and fulfilling lives.

This document provides an overview of Cameroon's journey towards achieving UHC.

<sup>1</sup> Reaching Universal Health Coverage by 2035: Is Cameroon on Track? <https://www.hrpub.org/download/20190430/UJPH4-17612901.pdf>



# Cameroon's Universal Health Coverage Roadmap Timeline



## PLANNING PHASE

2015-2021

### Stakeholder engagement, collaboration, and coordination

The national UHC technical working group (UHC-TWG) was established in 2015. The UHC-TWG was tasked with assessing the state of essential care and services in-country—analyzing households' access and contribution to essential services as well as their financial risks—while establishing requirements for implementing a UHC system.

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### Designing the standardized package of health services and protocols

- In 2020, the MoPH mandated that the National AIDS Control Committee of Cameroon remove all user fees for HIV management (care and treatment, including consultation).
- A full package of essential health services and quality indicators was developed and validated. The bundle of essential health services to be offered free of charge comprises 185 interventions ranging from prevention to care and treatment services for pregnant women, children under 5 years, patients on dialysis, and those diagnosed with tuberculosis, as well as HIV-related health services for PLHIV. Standardized nursing and medical protocols for HIV interventions were developed to establish practical expectations for the quality of care provided across health facilities and to outline inputs, such as equipment, medicines, and other consumables, that are required for effective service delivery.

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### Designing tools for health facility accreditation to ensure high-quality services and capacity building

- Manuals and tools were produced by the UHC-TWG in 2021 to guide health facility accreditation. The UHC accreditation manual, developed with support from the PEPFAR- and USAID-funded Reaching Impact, Saturation, and Epidemic Control (RISE) project, details required minimum norms, standards, processes, and procedures to provide the framework for governance, management, and monitoring of the accreditation process.
- A training series on UHC principles and practices was conducted with MoPH staff, UHC-TWG members, and regional actors at the national and decentralized levels. Health officials, RISE staff, and 120 staff members from ministries and administrations across the 10 regions were trained to effectively deliver and manage health care services under the UHC Phase I framework.

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“Now that the services are free, we realize that 90–99% of patients go for monitoring evaluation and adhere to their medicines, while having paid services previously was one of the reasons why we were losing these patients.”

— The Director of the Biyem-Assi District Hospital



Health worker in the HIV Care Unit of the District Hospital of Biyem-Assi. Photo credit: Timothe Chevaux, MSH

## Communication, sensitization, and community mobilization

- The MoPH used a combination of mass and localized communication strategies, such as community mobilization and the education of health officials at regional and district levels, health facility staff, civil society, and the general population, on UHC Phase I.
- A communication plan and relevant tools, including flyers, posters, short documentaries, banners, press kits, and audio and video spots, were designed, produced, and disseminated with support from RISE.
- Awareness sessions were organized for stakeholders and health facility staff during the launch in each region and were publicized through the media.

## Elaboration of implementation tools and guidelines

- UHC Phase I implementation tools (invoice management and enrollment of clients) were developed and validated in February and March 2023. These tools will facilitate key processes and ensure the launch of UHC.
- RISE built the capacity of a pool of national trainers with expertise in UHC to drive enrollment. RISE organized one national and eight regional training sessions on UHC to sensitize decentralized health officials at the regional and district levels.

## Launch event for Phase I of UHC services in Bertoua

The Minister of Health, Dr. Malachie Manaouda, launched UHC Phase I in Bertoua on April 12, 2023, and 7,000 Cameroonians were enrolled that day to receive free essential health services under the UHC program.

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## LAUNCH PHASE I OF UHC (2021-2023)

### Strengthening the governance framework for UHC Phase I

- The Stakeholders Leadership Group was created in 2022 to help shape the framework for health financing and advance UHC goals. This working group plays a vital role in providing guidance and advice on matters concerning health system strengthening and health financing within the context of UHC.
- The National Technical Unit was established in February 2023 to oversee and guide the implementation of UHC Phase I at the national level.

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### Communication and community mobilization

- Sensitization of the media, community, and civil society organizations was conducted in February 2023 to build a supportive and informed environment for the widespread understanding and utilization of UHC services.
- Informational meetings with administrative authorities and decentralized territorial communities were organized on the implementation mechanism of Phase I of the UHC in different regions.

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## MONITORING AND EVALUATION (2023 and beyond)

The MoPH, with support from its technical partners, will establish a robust national health information system for effectively monitoring key outcomes and tracking progress toward achieving UHC goals.

# Stakeholder Collaboration

## Government of Cameroon

The Government of Cameroon has developed a comprehensive roadmap and strategic plan outlining the vision, goals, and priority areas for UHC Phase I implementation. The government has engaged with various stakeholders to ensure their active participation and collaboration in the UHC process. In collaboration with national and international stakeholders, the Department of Health Promotion coordinated and spearheaded the development, production, and dissemination of the consolidated package of accessible free health services, standardized care protocols to ensure consistency in service delivery across health facilities, and the strategic communications plan.



People attending the UHC Phase I launch ceremony on April 12, 2023. Photo credit: The Ministry of Public Health

Cameroon's UHC Phase I implementation process has benefitted from the synchronized and considerable technical and financial support provided by the World Health Organization (WHO), Joint United Nations Program on HIV/AIDS (UNAIDS), World Bank, International Labor Organization, US Agency for International Development (USAID), and other national and international non-governmental organizations, as well as French and German bilateral cooperation.

## USAID

Since 2016, USAID, through the RISE project, has worked to support the Government of Cameroon to achieve a number of key milestones in the journey toward UHC. Notably, RISE supported the development, production, and dissemination of the strategic communications plan and accompanying materials promoting UHC in Cameroon. Through RISE, USAID also supported the development and costing of the consolidated package of free interventions for UHC and the training and capacity building of regional officials on costing and budgeting tools. RISE also supported development of the UHC accreditation framework and tools for facility enrollment in the program and led regional teams in testing, refining, and finalizing the instruments.

## GIZ/P4H

The German Agency for International Cooperation GmbH (GIZ), through its P4H and PROPOSAR projects, has worked with the Government of Cameroon to develop guideline documents and tools and has provided support for the establishment and operation of health vouchers in the Southern and Eastern regions.

## Acknowledgement

The Government of Cameroon extends its congratulations and gratitude to officials of the MoPH and partner ministries, technical and financial partners, members of the UHC-TWG, civil society organizations, and all the experts who have contributed tirelessly to the success of UHC Phase I. The MoPH appreciates the unwavering support of all stakeholders throughout this process and looks forward to further collaboration as Cameroon continues its journey to a gradual and complete transformation of its health system to ensure accessible and equitable health care for all Cameroonians.

## About RISE

RISE is a global project funded by the U.S. President's Emergency Plan for AIDS Relief (PEPFAR) and USAID. RISE supports countries to achieve a shared vision of attaining and maintaining HIV epidemic control, working with local partners capable of achieving results through sustainable and self-reliant health systems. As a core partner, Management Sciences for Health (MSH) leads the project's foundational work on health systems strengthening for sustainable HIV services by working with stakeholders at all levels of the health system. The RISE partnership is led by Jhpiego, in consortium with ICAP at Columbia University, MSH, ANOVA Health Institute, BAO Systems, JHU Center for Public Health and Human Rights, and Mann Global Health.

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