

Universal Health Coverage (UHC) in Africa

Statement Sixty-Seventh WHO Regional Committee for Africa **28 August – 1 September 2017, Victoria Falls, Republic of Zimbabwe**

30th August, Victoria Falls, Republic of Zimbabwe - Thank you for the opportunity to contribute to this important discussion today. IFPMA represents leading research-based pharmaceutical companies as well as national and regional industry associations across the world, including two in Africa.

Today's meeting and the organization in June of the First Africa Health Forum on Universal Health Coverage (UHC) emphasized the wide consensus of countries on the important enabling role of UHC in achieving health for all.

IFPMA commends the integration of UHC as a goal in the national health strategies of African countries, and the rapid increase in total health expenditure in Africa which we have witnessed over the last two decades. Health plays a central role in enabling sustainable development, and investing in health goes hand in hand with economic growth and prosperity. As WHO's own research shows, much of the increase in health spending, however, has been due to an increase in out-of-pocket expenditure by households and development assistance¹.

As Dr Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus, WHO Director-General, recently pointed out, "UHC is more a political than an economic challenge", highlighting the need for further commitment from national governments to increase their spending. At the same time, IFPMA believes that structured, collaborative action on universal health coverage will help meet the shared goals of expanding patient access to medicines through innovative solutions, and achieving long-term sustainability of the health sector. The pharmaceutical industry is an important partner, especially in regards to investing in medicines and vaccines development and pursuing innovative approaches to expand access. In addition, working in novel partnerships with NGOs, governments and private sector entities, the industry is supporting UHC through providing expertise in ensuring the quality and integrity of the supply chain, training health care workers, and filling gaps in underserved areas. These all support capabilities which are becoming increasingly essential as the burden of non-communicable diseases (NCDs) rises in Africa, populations age and more countries transition to middle-income status, demanding improved health care services. Access to neglected tropical disease (NTDs) interventions are also an integral part of UHC particularly in Africa, and here the private sector has also played a crucial role, through commitments such as the London Declaration. We are a natural solution partner to governments and patients.

Given the complexities associated with UHC, we encourage governments to explore working through public-private partnerships focused on a wide range of areas, from health literacy and health system strengthening to access to quality service and financial protection schemes. We believe that UHC will only be achieved after a process of learning from experiences and evolving innovation; such processes will produce the best healthcare models, tailored to the needs of each country, instead of "one-size-fits-all" solutions that potentially limit growth. A strong health economy based on country self-sustaining model consistent with national economic development goals is essential to ensure a sustainable system, independent from development assistance. We stand ready to work hand-in-hand with governments to support new models of health financing and delivery that are adaptable to local conditions.

¹ http://www.who.int/health_financing/documents/uhc-in-africa-a-framework-for-action.pdf?ua=1