



## Book Review

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### The World Health Report 2013: Research for universal health coverage

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In 2005, all member states of the United Nations made the commitment to achieve universal health coverage. In many developed nations health coverage of reasonably good quality is available to all residents, but in developing nations, health care provided by the government is often perceived as being of poor quality, with long waiting times and poor access for many citizens. As a result, people pay out-of-pocket for healthcare expenses and downstream effects include prolonged illness and impoverished families. The 2013 World Health Report has the theme of universal health coverage and underlines the important need for research to develop, implement, and administer universal health coverage for countries and regions.

The report highlights the importance of research (especially health systems research) to achieve universal health coverage. The methodology and important issues in health systems research has been addressed in previous publications. In 2004, the Alliance for Health Policy and Systems Research published a book on strengthening health systems using systems research. The International Development Research Centre in Canada ([www.idrc.ca](http://www.idrc.ca)) has published a step-by-step guide to systems research.

Chapter 1 of the report addresses “The role of research for universal health coverage”. Research questions in this field pertain to: 1) improving health and well being; and 2) dealing with the data and indicators to monitor the functioning and impact of health systems. The map showing out-of-pocket expenditure as a percentage of total expenditure on health shows that in many developing nations, including India and other South Asian countries, more than 40 per cent of health expenditure is out-of-pocket (paid for by individuals using their own resources).

Chapter 2 examines the growth of research for universal health coverage. The framework for classifying research studies and the research cycle was interesting. A number of innovations are linked to the proliferation of mobile phone technology in the developing world and the report describes one technological advance where the sounds from the mother’s womb are listened to using a Pinard Horn fitted with a miniature microphone, transmitted to a smart phone, and analysed using installed software with a simple English readout produced for the user (<http://allafrica.com/stories/201205240064.html>).

The focus of chapter 3 is on how research contributes to universal health coverage and includes 12 case studies. Among the studies mentioned are: insecticide-treated mosquito nets to reduce childhood mortality; antiretroviral therapy to prevent sexual transmission of HIV; zinc supplementation to reduce pneumonia and diarrhoea in young children; telemedicine to improve the quality of paediatric care; the “polypill” to reduce mortality from cardiovascular diseases; conditional cash transfers to improve the use of health services and health outcomes; and insurance in the provision of affordable and accessible health services.

Chapter 4 focuses on building research systems for universal health coverage. A figure provides highlights from a 26-country survey of the status of health systems research showing poor countries generally had less research capacity and carried out less research. Throughout the book photographs, tables, and boxes enhance the report’s readability and provide additional interesting information.

The book provides an overview of how research can contribute towards achieving universal health coverage and is well designed with a pleasing use of colours and visuals. A certain degree of knowledge about health systems research is required to understand certain descriptions in the book. The book provides a snapshot of the subject and though certain medical terms have been explained, lay persons may find certain parts of the book difficult to comprehend.



**About the book:** The World Health Report 2013 Research for universal health coverage

The book is available from:  
[http://apps.who.int/iris/bitstream/10665/85761/2/9789240690837\\_eng.pdf?ua=1](http://apps.who.int/iris/bitstream/10665/85761/2/9789240690837_eng.pdf?ua=1).

It can be downloaded for free from the WHO website. It is also available in paperback format via the WHO online bookstore (<http://www.who.int/bookorders>) at a cost of US\$48.00 (developing countries CHF 20). Payment can be made through credit card or by bank transfer. Local sales agents may be available in certain countries: visit the WHO bookstore website for more information.

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### **PEER REVIEW**

Not commissioned. Externally peer reviewed.

### **CONFLICTS OF INTEREST**

The author declares that he has no competing interests.