

The Question of Equitable Access to Healthcare

Background Information

- The issue of equitable access to healthcare is a critical challenge facing the world today. According to the World Health Organization (WHO), at least half of the world's population lacks access to essential health services, and healthcare expenses push around 100 million people into extreme poverty every year. The lack of access to healthcare results in high morbidity and mortality rates, particularly among vulnerable populations such as women, children, and the elderly.
- One of the primary barriers to accessing healthcare is poverty, which restricts people's financial means to access basic medicines, vaccines, and diagnostic tests. Inadequate healthcare infrastructure results in many low and middle-income countries lacking basic healthcare facilities, such as hospitals, clinics, and health centers. Even when these facilities exist, they often lack essential medical equipment, medicines, and diagnostic tests. Additionally, it limits access to transportation to healthcare facilities, making it challenging to seek medical care when needed. The shortage of trained healthcare professionals is also a significant challenge in many parts of the world, particularly in rural areas, which limits people's ability to access healthcare services. Moreover, healthcare workers are often poorly paid, overworked, and lack adequate training and resources, affecting the quality of care they provide. Political instability and conflict are also significant barriers to accessing healthcare, leading to the destruction of healthcare infrastructure and the flight of healthcare workers due to safety concerns. Inadequate funding from governments further exacerbates the situation in many countries.

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- The lack of equitable access to healthcare has significant social, economic, and health effects, particularly on the most vulnerable populations. Maternal and child mortality rates are particularly high in low and middle-income countries, where many women lack access to basic maternal healthcare services. Healthcare expenses can lead to impoverishment, which further perpetuates the cycle of poverty.

Definitions

- **Equitable access:** the concept of ensuring that everyone, regardless of their socio-economic status, geographic location, or other factors, has equal access to healthcare services.
- **Essential health services:** a set of health services that should be available to all individuals and communities, including prevention, promotion, treatment, and rehabilitation.
- **Universal health coverage (UHC):** a framework for ensuring that all people have access to essential health services without suffering financial hardship.
- **Health inequality:** differences in health status or in the distribution of health determinants between different population groups.
- **Health equity:** the absence of unfair and avoidable differences in health outcomes and in the distribution of health determinants.
- **Social determinants of health:** the conditions in which people are born, grow, live, work, and age, including factors such as income, education, housing, and social support, which can have a significant impact on health outcomes.
- **Health system:** the combination of resources, organizations, and institutions that provide healthcare services to individuals and communities, including health service providers, health financing mechanisms, health workforce, and health information systems.

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- Primary healthcare: essential healthcare that is based on practical, scientifically sound, and socially acceptable methods and technology, and is made universally accessible to individuals and families in the community through their full participation and at a cost that the community and the country can afford.
- Health disparities: differences in health outcomes that are closely linked with social, economic, and environmental disadvantage.
- Health equity index: a tool used to measure the level of health equity within a population or healthcare system, by analysing health outcomes and their distribution across different population groups.
- Healthcare financing: the means by which healthcare services are paid for, including government-funded healthcare, private insurance, out-of-pocket payments, and other financing mechanisms.

Key Points

- Equitable access to healthcare is a fundamental human right that is essential for achieving health and well-being for all individuals and communities. Healthcare is a basic need that should be available to everyone, regardless of their social status or economic situation.
- The lack of equitable access to healthcare is a significant global challenge, with at least half of the world's population lacking access to essential health services. This lack of access can result in poor health outcomes, increased poverty, and social inequality.
- Poverty is a major barrier to accessing healthcare services, as it limits people's financial means to access basic medicines, vaccines, and diagnostic tests, as well as transportation to healthcare facilities. Addressing poverty is essential to improving equitable access to healthcare, as it can provide individuals and communities with the resources they need to access essential healthcare services.
- Inadequate healthcare infrastructure is another significant factor contributing to the lack of equitable access to healthcare. Many low and middle-income countries lack basic healthcare facilities and essential medical equipment, medicines, and diagnostic tests. Improving healthcare infrastructure is critical to improving equitable access to

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healthcare, as it can provide individuals and communities with the healthcare services they need to achieve good health outcomes.

- The shortage of trained healthcare professionals is also a significant challenge in many parts of the world, particularly in rural areas, where healthcare workers are often poorly paid, overworked, and lack adequate training and resources. Addressing this shortage is essential to improving equitable access to healthcare, as it can provide individuals and communities with the healthcare services they need to achieve good health outcomes.
- Political instability and conflict are significant barriers to accessing healthcare, leading to the destruction of healthcare infrastructure and the flight of healthcare workers due to safety concerns. Addressing political instability and conflict is essential to improving equitable access to healthcare, as it can provide individuals and communities with the stability they need to access essential healthcare services.
- Inadequate funding from governments further exacerbates the situation in many countries, making it challenging to provide essential healthcare services to all individuals and communities. Addressing inadequate funding is essential to improving equitable access to healthcare, as it can provide healthcare systems with the resources they need to provide essential healthcare services to all individuals and communities.
- Universal health coverage (UHC) is a framework for ensuring that all people have access to essential health services without suffering financial hardship, which can help to improve equitable access to healthcare. UHC is essential to improving equitable access to healthcare, as it can provide individuals and communities with the healthcare services they need to achieve good health outcomes, without imposing financial hardship.
- Healthcare access barriers, such as financial barriers, geographic barriers, cultural barriers, and language barriers, also contribute to the lack of equitable access to healthcare. Addressing these barriers is essential to improving access to healthcare services for all individuals and communities, as it can provide individuals with the resources they need to access essential healthcare services.
- Improving the quality of healthcare services is essential to achieving equitable access to healthcare, as high-quality healthcare services can improve health outcomes and promote patient-centred care that meets the needs of diverse populations. Improving

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healthcare quality is essential to achieving equitable access to healthcare, as it can provide individuals and communities with the healthcare services they need to achieve good health outcomes.

- Healthcare workforce development is essential to achieving equitable access to healthcare, as it ensures that healthcare professionals are adequately trained and resourced to provide high-quality healthcare services to all individuals and communities. Developing the healthcare workforce is essential to achieving equitable access to healthcare, as it can provide individuals and communities with the healthcare services they need to achieve good health outcomes.

Previous Action

- In 1978, the World Health Organization (WHO), which is part of the UN, launched the Alma-Ata Declaration on Primary Health Care, which called for "Health for All" by the year 2000. The declaration emphasized the importance of primary healthcare in achieving health for all, particularly for underserved and marginalized populations.
- In 2000, the UN adopted the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs), which included a specific goal on improving access to healthcare. The goal aimed to reduce child mortality, improve maternal health, and combat HIV/AIDS, malaria, and other diseases by 2015.
- In 2015, the UN adopted the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), which included a specific goal on achieving universal health coverage (UHC) by 2030. The goal aims to ensure that all individuals and communities have access to quality healthcare services without suffering financial hardship.
- In 2019, the UN held the High-Level Meeting on Universal Health Coverage, which brought together heads of state, ministers, and other leaders to discuss progress towards achieving UHC and to make commitments to advance UHC efforts.
- In response to the COVID-19 pandemic, the UN has called for global cooperation to ensure equitable access to COVID-19 vaccines and treatments. The UN has emphasized the need for countries to work together to ensure that vaccines and treatments are distributed fairly, particularly to underserved and marginalized populations.

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- The UN has also established various initiatives and programs aimed at improving equitable access to healthcare, including the WHO's Health Systems Strengthening Program, the UNICEF's Maternal and Child Health Program, and the UNAIDS' Global Fund to Fight AIDS, Tuberculosis and Malaria. These programs aim to improve healthcare infrastructure, provide essential medicines and vaccines, and promote health equity and social justice.

These actions demonstrate the UN's commitment to promoting equitable access to healthcare, particularly for underserved and marginalized populations. The UN continues to work towards achieving the SDG goal of universal health coverage by 2030, and to address the various barriers to healthcare access that prevent individuals and communities from achieving good health outcomes.

Questions to consider

- What are the barriers to equitable access to healthcare, and how can they be addressed?
- How can healthcare systems be designed to ensure that they are responsive to the needs of diverse populations, including underserved and marginalized communities?
- What policies and programs are needed to ensure that all individuals and communities have access to quality healthcare services without suffering financial hardship?
- How can healthcare infrastructure, including hospitals, clinics, and medical equipment, be improved to promote equitable access to healthcare?
- How can healthcare workers be trained and supported to provide culturally sensitive care that meets the needs of diverse populations?
- How can health equity and social justice be promoted in healthcare systems to address health disparities and inequalities?
- How can global cooperation and partnerships be strengthened to promote equitable access to healthcare, particularly in low- and middle-income countries?
- How can emerging technologies, such as telemedicine and digital health, be used to improve access to healthcare and promote health equity?

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- How can healthcare financing mechanisms be reformed to promote equitable access to healthcare, particularly for underserved and marginalized populations?
- How can the voices and perspectives of patients and communities be included in healthcare decision-making processes to ensure that healthcare systems are responsive to their needs and priorities?
- Addressing these questions requires a comprehensive approach that involves multiple stakeholders, including governments, healthcare providers, civil society organizations, and communities themselves. It also requires a commitment to health equity and social justice, as well as a recognition of the importance of healthcare as a fundamental human right.

The Question of Investment into Cancer Research projects

Background:

Cancer is a leading cause of death worldwide, accounting for an estimated 9.6 million deaths in 2018, and projections indicate that this number will continue to rise. Cancer is a complex and diverse disease, and there are more than 100 different types of cancer that can affect different parts of the body. The causes of cancer are varied and include lifestyle factors such as smoking and diet, as well as genetic factors and exposure to environmental toxins.

Cancer research has made significant strides in recent years, and there have been many important breakthroughs in our understanding of the disease and its treatment. However, there is still much work to be done, and investment into cancer research is crucial if we are to make further progress in the fight against cancer.

Definitions:

1. Cancer research: The scientific investigation of cancer biology, causes, prevention, diagnosis, treatment, and survivorship.
2. Investment: The allocation of funds, resources, or efforts towards a particular project or endeavour.

Key Points:

1. Investment in cancer research is crucial to understanding the underlying mechanisms of the disease and developing new treatments that can improve patient outcomes.

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2. Investment in cancer research can also stimulate economic growth and create jobs in the biotech and pharmaceutical industries.
3. There are significant disparities in cancer outcomes and access to care based on race, ethnicity, socioeconomic status, and geography. Investment in cancer research should prioritize addressing these disparities.
4. Funding for cancer research has been declining in recent years, despite the growing burden of cancer on society.
5. Investing in cancer research is not just an ethical imperative but also a strategic one, as it can yield significant social and economic benefits.

Questions to Consider:

1. What strategies can be employed to increase funding for cancer research?
2. How can investment in cancer research be prioritized to address disparities in cancer outcomes and access to care?
3. What role can public-private partnerships play in advancing cancer research and improving patient outcomes?
4. How can cancer research be translated into clinical practice and ultimately benefit patients?
5. How can international collaboration be encouraged to accelerate progress in cancer research?

The Question of the Covid Pandemic

Background

The coronavirus infection (COVID-19) and first outbreak in a populous was announced in the Chinese city of Wuhan in December 2019.

The COVID-19 infection is caused by a spreadable virus and was named as 'severe acute respiratory syndrome coronavirus 2', (SARS-CoV-2) by the World Health Organisation.

On the 11th of March 2020, the World Health Organisation characterized the outbreak as a global pandemic, and this was subsequently followed by lockdowns and the imposition or tightening of restrictions globally.

Covid-19 immunity did not exist in the ways in which immunity did with other diseases, due to a non-vaccinated population. Vulnerability to the Covid-19 pandemic resulted in schools, universities and colleges being closed in 63 countries, impacting roughly 47% of students worldwide.

Throughout 2020 and 2021 lockdowns continued and became stricter with the rise of infections and deaths, particularly in dense Asian countries such as India, where the entire 1.3bn population was ordered to stay at home.

However, there were some states who did not implement lockdowns to control the Covid-19 Pandemic and looked to alternative methods.

Global economies went into recession with firms going bankrupt, creating mass unemployment and a huge fall in production, massively inflating prices of goods for the consumer resulting in increased inequality and poverty.

The Covid Pandemic saw the easing of restrictions gradually at different points in times, due to an increase and decrease in lag times of Covid-19 variants entering and leaving a country. Select states (such as China) have opted for a policy of reintroducing lockdowns and measures with slight rises in cases as well.

With the development and mass vaccination program of the Covid-19 vaccine in December 2021, travel and non-essential businesses began to reopen towards the end of 2021 and start of 2022.

Definitions

Pandemic- A global spread of a new disease/ an epidemic occurring worldwide, crossing international boundaries, affecting many people.

Lockdown- A restriction policy for people, community, region or a country to stay where they are due to a specific risk that could potentially inflict harm if the people are allowed to move freely. The protocol can be designed to be enforced by law enforcement.

Key Statistics

Official case, death numbers of G7 countries reported, (excl. EU):

Canada- 4.59M, 51K

Germany- 38M, 167K

France- 38,5M, 161K

Italy- 25.5M, 188K

India- 44.7M, 531K

Japan-33.1M, 71K

UK- 24.3M, 218K

USA- 103M, 1.12M

Global trade fell by 8.9% in 2020- steepest fall since 2008

Relevant Organisations

- United Nations World Health Organisation (WHO)
- International Labour Organization (ILO)
- United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs' (OCHA)
- United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR)
- United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR)
- United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs (UN DESA)

Questions to consider

1. Can an international response to a declared pandemic be uniform, and if so, how?
2. What legal protections can be internationally implemented to be able to pass emergency legislation?
3. How can health misinformation be tackled?
4. How do we protect and recover global economies following the Covid-19 Pandemic?
5. How do

Useful Links

[International Labour Organization](#)

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[World Health Organisation- COVID-19](#)

[United Nations Covid-19 Response](#)