

Why assistive technology matters for universal health coverage

Robia was 6 months old in 2009 when she fell ill with polio and was unable to move her legs. Through a combination of assistive technology in the form of a support brace, and rehabilitation at the National Orthopaedic Centre in Tajikistan, she is now thriving at school.

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Assistive technology is an important component of health care and achieving universal health coverage (UHC). UHC is part of the 2030 Agenda's sustainable development vision for everyone, everywhere, to access the health services they need without facing financial hardship. However, UHC can only be realized if people are able to access quality assistive technology when, and where, they need it.

Assistive technology plays a crucial and transformative role in this area. The inclusion of assistive technology, in line with countries' national priorities and contexts, into health systems is essential for realizing progress towards UHC and the Sustainable Development Goals. A comprehensive, sustainable and multisectoral approach to improving access to assistive technology is needed at national and subnational levels.



In low-income countries only

10%

of people have the assistive technology they need.

With ageing populations and increased prevalence of noncommunicable diseases, and health emergencies

3.5 BILLION

people are predicted to need assistive technology by 2050.



Member States adopted a political declaration on UHC
in 2023

that explicitly recognizes assistive technology and challenges of access.

Why assistive technology matters for UHC

Access to assistive technology is essential for the successful delivery of quality health care services, across the continuum of health care at all levels, along with promotion, prevention, treatment, rehabilitation and palliative care. It should be an essential component of integrated health services. Yet many people in low- and middle-income countries who need these services are unable to access them. Financial barriers are a key reason for not seeking or accessing assistive technology. For many countries, the cost of providing assistive technology through health systems is prohibitive. As many countries operate in limited fiscal space, coverage of assistive technology within universal health coverage may start with priority assistive products, expanding to others as both human and financial resources become available. Greater access to assistive technology generates long-term savings for health systems and governments.

The overall physical and mental health benefits of assistive technology are huge to people with many health conditions and those experiencing disability across the lifespan. Over the course of users' lives, assistive technology can facilitate people's ability to move, see, hear, and communicate. This directly contributes to improving physical and mental health, reducing complications from health conditions. Assistive technology is an investment that contributes to health, economic and social development.

Assistive technology allows everyone to access the health services they need for their health and wellbeing leaving no one behind. For example, a wheelchair, an artificial limb, a hearing aid or a pair of eyeglasses can increase people's access to other health care services, improving overall wellbeing for a healthier life. Greater access to preventive care generates long-term savings for health systems and governments.



Inclusion is key to realize the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and leave no one behind. There will not be full inclusion while people are unable to access assistive technology. Assistive technology cuts across all 17 SDGs and is particularly relevant to some including SDG 3: Good health and well-being.

Assistive Technology is an umbrella term for assistive products such as wheelchairs, hearing aids, prostheses, eyeglasses or digital devices, and their related systems and services.

ATscale is a cross-sector global partnership with a mission to improve people's lives through assistive technology. It catalyzes action to ensure that, by 2030, an additional 500 million people in low- and middle-income countries get the life-changing assistive technology they need.

Together, let's ensure access to assistive technology for all who need it.