

The SAVE-UHC Project

Ethics for priority-setting on the path to National Health Insurance

Priority-setting for health is morally complex with unavoidable trade-offs. As South Africa moves forward with the implementation of National Health Insurance (NHI), with the aim of delivering high quality, affordable, and equitable health care for all citizens, policymakers will inevitably face ethical dilemmas in healthcare coverage decisions. Tough decisions will have to be made on how to use a limited health budget to cover the vast and diverse needs of the population. An ethics framework embodying and specifying the country's core values for NHI can help policymakers

THE CHALLENGE

The NHI White Paper articulates a strong commitment to the values of justice, fairness, efficiency, social solidarity, and delivery of health interventions that are accessible and appropriate to meet local needs. However, challenging questions remain on how to translate these high-level values and commitments into specific coverage decisions for health interventions.

Among the many health inequities that exist across different population subgroups – in access to health services, in health outcomes, in the financial burdens associated with illness – how are policymakers to determine which are the priorities for NHI to address and what interventions will best narrow these disparities. How should policymakers evaluate coverage decisions that entail trade-offs and conflicts between multiple articulated values?

Such questions underscore the need for a priority-setting process that takes into account the range of important ethical values, principles, and considerations to deliver on the promises of NHI.

THE OPPORTUNITY

Health Technology Assessment (HTA) has been an increasingly popular approach for systematically evaluating health coverage decisions on the path to UHC. South Africa is signatory to the World Health Assembly HTA resolution of 2014 and the revised NHI White Paper of 2017 re-emphasizes the importance of an HTA process to guide NHI decisions – with a multi-disciplinary group of experts reviewing the range of health interventions. This will be very broadly defined, and will include interventions for health promotion, disease prevention, diagnosis, treatment, and rehabilitation, including the more traditional health technologies like drugs and devices.

The development of an HTA process presents a critical opportunity to include explicit and systematic analysis of the ethical considerations for whether, when, and for whom health interventions will be provided. There is now an important window for the generation of an ethics framework for NHI, developed by South Africans for the South African context, to inform the country's future processes for health priority-setting.



OUR WORK

South African Values and Ethics for Universal Health Coverage (SAVE-UHC) is a unique 3-year research project funded by the Wellcome Trust which aims to bring together a variety of country stakeholders to develop an ethics framework for priority-setting in our context. The stakeholder Working Group includes representatives from national and provincial government, patient advocacy groups, medical associations, civil society organisations, private insurers, and academic institutions. Once the Working Group has developed a provisional framework, it will be tested by conducting ethics analysis and simulated appraisals for a number of health interventions being considered for coverage.

Develop Context-Specific
Ethics Framework



Ethics Analysis and
Appraisal of Health
Interventions Using the
Framework



Refine the Ethics
Framework and Analysis
Approach



Deliver Framework and
Findings to Policymakers
Working on NHI



In addition to providing a roadmap for ethics analysis for priority-setting in South Africa, the project could serve as a model for other countries working toward Universal Health Coverage.

RESEARCH AND FACILITATION TEAM

The efforts of Working Group will be supported by a collaborative group of international experts in ethics, public health, health technology assessment, and priority-setting. This team will coordinate working group meetings, provide research support, and pilot test the resulting ethics framework. Partners contributing to the project include Priority Cost Effective Lessons for Systems Strengthening (PRICELESS-SA), Stellenbosch University, Imperial College London, Johns Hopkins Berman Institute of Bioethics, and the International Decision Support Initiative.

Leadership Team

Karen Hofman

Founding Director of PRICELESS-SA
University of Witwatersrand

Kalipso Chalkidou

Director of Global Health Policy
Centre for Global Development

Carleigh Krubiner

Project Director & Policy Fellow
Centre for Global Development

Ruth Faden

Founding Director, Johns Hopkins
Berman Institute of Bioethics

Aviva Tugendhaft

Deputy Director of PRICELESS-SA at
the University of Witwatersrand

Nicola Barsdorf

Head of Health Research Ethics at
Stellenbosch University

Ryan Li

Adviser, Global Health and Development Group,
Imperial College London

Sue Goldstein

Deputy Director of PRICELESS-SA
University of Witwatersrand