



## “PRIORITIES OF HEALTH ECONOMICS IN AFRICA”

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### **PT 10**

#### **Achieving universal coverage in health to promote equity and redistribution in South Africa: lessons from ‘successful’ countries.**

<sup>1</sup> *Di McIntyre and Gabila Fohtung*

<sup>1</sup> Health Economics Unit, University of Cape Town

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South Africa has a two tier health system, fragmented along socio-economics lines, with the minority rich accessing the private health sector for all their health requirements covered by private health Insurance (Medical schemes), and the majority of the population dependent on relatively under-resourced, tax funded public sector health facilities (McIntyre et al,2006:81).The absence of a defined benefit package of health services accessible to all, irrespective of ability to pay, is a major challenge with regard to equity in health services in South Africa. The fact that a person’s socioeconomic status is very often a determinant of the level and quality of health care that they are able to access testifies to the presence of great inequities within the country’s health system that require rectifying policy action.

Taking cognisance of the context, this paper seeks to make a case for South Africa to adopt universal coverage as its principal health policy objective. Universal coverage in health care depicts a situation where the population of a country has access to good quality services according to needs and preferences, regardless of income level, social status, or residency. Implying the features of ‘equity of access’, ‘financial risk protection’ and equity in financing, meaning contributions are made on the basis of the ability to pay (Mills, 2007:6).This objective shall be accomplished by drawing lessons from the experience of countries that have attained universal coverage in health care as defined above. The focus shall not be exclusively on the health system and its evolution but also on the economic, political and social context (and the other determinant factors) in each country at the time of initiation of the move to UC and through the period of move towards UC. This is expected to bring out clear pointers to the South African situation providing a framework through which it can assess its readiness to move towards a universal coverage policy and the areas and factors that must be prioritized in adopting such a move. It is expected that the findings obtained will contribute to the debate on the adoption of policies that would promote equity and redistribution in South Africa.