McIntyre, D; McKee, M; Balabanova, D; Atim, C; Reddy, KS; Patcharanarumol, W; 250 signatories, a full list of signatories is available in the; (2016) Open letter on the SDGs: a robust measure for universal health coverage is essential. Lancet. ISSN 0140-6736 DOI: https://doi.org/10.1016/S0140-6736(16)32189-4

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Dear members of the Inter-Agency Expert Group on the Sustainable Development Goals (IAEG-SDGs),

We write as members of the health academic and research community to urge you to agree a refinement of SDG Indicator 3.8.2 on financial risk protection for universal health coverage when you meet this week at the IAEG-SDGs meeting in Geneva.

Universal health coverage (UHC) has the potential to transform the lives of millions of people by bringing life-saving health care to those who need it most. Worldwide, every year, one billion people are denied medical care because they cannot afford to pay, while 100 million are pushed into poverty by health care costs. The need for UHC couldn’t be more urgent, and the inclusion of a target to achieve UHC in the SDGs is a triumph of global decision-making.

Universal health coverage means that everyone can access the quality health services they need without being pushed, or pushed further, into poverty. There are two clear indicators required to measure universal health coverage – one for coverage (Indicator 3.8.1) and one that can measure effective financial risk protection (Indicator 3.8.2). We are pleased to see both aspects of UHC reflected in the framework and we congratulate you on agreeing a robust indicator for health coverage (3.8.1).

We are, however, very concerned that indicator 3.8.2 for financial risk protection as it stands – *Coverage by health insurance or a public health system per 1,000 population* – will fail to measure the impoverishing effect of health spending meaningfully, and could undermine real progress towards UHC. Having a public health system or an insurance mechanism is, in itself, not a measure or guarantee of financial risk protection. Moreover, this indicator will not produce data that can be disaggregated by income or gender.

We endorse the World Health Organisation (WHO) and World Bank supported refinement to indicator 3.8.2 – *Proportion of the population with large household expenditures on health, as a total share of household expenditure or consumption*. Data on household expenditure on health can be collected from existing household surveys and this indicator allows for disaggregation, including by measures such as income and gender.

As members of the academic and research community, we want to see an indicator of financial risk protection that is scientifically robust and neutral with regard to alternative health financing mechanisms. A methodologically sound measure of the financial burden of healthcare costs on household budgets will help academics, researchers, and health policy makers to better understand the effectiveness of different policy instruments, and can best support evidence-based policy making.

We are grateful for the opportunity to convey this message to you, and we hope that, on consideration, you will agree an indicator for financial risk protection that supports our global ambition for quality, affordable, and equitable health care coverage that leaves no-one behind.

Yours sincerely,
Signed by the following 351 individuals:

Dr Gilbert Abotisem Abiiro, Lecturer and Researcher, University for Development Studies, Ghana
Mr Aboubakar, Economiste de la santé, Chef division Planification et Carte sanitaire, Ministère de la santé et de la Protection Sociale, Togo
Mr Prince Adjovi, Health Economist, Ministry of Health, Bénin
Dr A. Adomah-Afari, Lecturer, University of Ghana, Ghana
Mr Sani Garba Affa, State Coordinator, National Health Insurance Scheme, Nigeria
Dr Erasmus E. A. Agongo, Secretary of the Faculty of Public Health of Ghana College of Physicians and Surgeons, Ghana College of Physicians and Surgeons, Ghana
Dr Irene Akua Agyepong, Specialist Public Health, Research and Development Directorate, Ghana Health Service, Ghana
Dr Francis Adegoke Akanbiemu, Consultant Public Health Physician and Director, Planning Research and Statistics, Ondo State Hospital Management Board, Nigeria
Dr James Akazili, Project Manager, INDEPTH Network/Navrongo Health Research Centre, Ghana
Dr Juliette Alenda-Demoutiez, Assistant Professor, Cleresé, Université Lille 1, France
Dr Yussif Nagumse Alhassan, Research Associate, Coventry University, United Kingdom
Dr Jamal Alsharif, Founder, Humans for Peace Institution, Canada
Mr Birindabagabo Pascal Amato, Health Insurance Policy Expert, Ministry of Health, Rwanda
Dr Ruhul Amin, Health Planning and Management Coordinator, Luxembourg Development Cooperation Agency, Lao PDR
Dr Mary Amoakoh-Coleman, Post Doc Fellow, School of Public Health, University of Ghana, Legon, Ghana
Dr Eugenia Amporfu, Senior Lecturer, Kwame Nkrumah University of Science and Technology, Ghana
Professor Joseph Ana, Lead Consultant and Trainer, Africa Centre for Clinical Governance, Research, and Patient Safety, Nigeria
Dr Evelyn K. Ansah, Deputy Director, Ghana Health Service, Ghana
Ms Gifty Ofori Ansah, District Director of Health Services, Ghana Health Service, Ningo Prampram, Ghana
Dr Laura Anslemi, Research Associate, Centre for Health Economics, University of Manchester, United Kingdom
Dr Eric Arthur, Lecturer, Kwame Nkrumah University of Science and Technology, Ghana
Mr Tesfaye D Ashagari, Senior Associate/ Economist, Abt Associates Inc, USA
Dr John E. Ataguba, Senior Lecturer, Health Economics Unit, University of Cape Town, South Africa
Dr Chris Atim, Executive Director, African Health Economics and Policy Association (AfHEA), Ghana
Dr Abiodun Awosusi, Health Economist, Health Systems and Development Enterprises, Nigeria
Mr Henrik Axelson, on behalf of Dr Yogesh Rajkotia, CEO, ThinkWell, United States
Dr Idris Baba, Public Health Specialist, Kaduna, Nigeria
Dr Frank Baiden, Head, Epidemiology, Ensign College of Public Health, Ghana
Professor Brook Baker, School of Law, Northeastern University, United States, and Honorary Research Fellow, University of KwaZulu Natal, South Africa
Dr Dina Balabanova, Associate Professor, London School of Hygiene & Tropical Medicine, United Kingdom
Dr Rob Baltussen PhD, Associate Professor Global Health Economics, Radboud University Medical Centre, The Netherlands
Mr Stephen Banda, Director of Policy and Planning, Ministry of Health and Child Care, Harare, Zimbabwe
Dr Edwine Barasa, Research Fellow, Health Economics Research Unit, KEMRI-Wellcome Trust, Kenya
Professor Criel Bart, Professor, Institute of Tropical Medicine, Antwerp, Belgium
Dr Elaine Baruwa, Principal Associate/Health Economist, Abt Associates, Inc., United States
Dr Benjamin Bellows, Associate, Population Council, United States
Dr Sara Bennett, Professor of International Health, Johns Hopkins Bloomberg School of Public Health, United States
Dr Rito Bergemann MD, Director Value Evidence Outcomes Rare Diseases, GSK, United Kingdom
Dr Leon Bijlmakers, Senior Researcher Health Policy, Radboud University Medical Centre, The Netherlands
Dr Fadima Yaya Bocoum, Researcher, Institut de Recherche en Science de la Santé, Burkina Faso
Professor Vincent de Brouwere, Head of Maternal and Reproductive Health Unit, Department of Public Health, Institute of Tropical Medicine, Belgium
Dr Hector Carrasco, MPH candidate, John Hopkins School of Public Health, United States
Dr Paula Braveman, Professor of Family and Community Medicine, University of California, San Francisco, United States
Dr Samue Ohouo Brou, Health Economist, Consultant, Cote D’Ivoire
Professor Michael Clarke, Adjunct Professor, InterFaculty Program in Public Health, Western University, Canada
Dr Donald C Cole, Professor, Dalla Lana School of Public Health, University of Toronto, Canada
Ms Catherine Connor, Principal Associate, Abt Associates Inc., United States
Ms Sarah Crawford-Browne, Lecturer, University of Cape Town, South Africa
Professor Jacqueline Cumming, Professor of Health Policy and Management, Health Services Research Centre, Victoria University of Wellington, New Zealand
Dr Filippo Curtale, Heath Sector Advisor, BTC, Uganda
Mr Philip Ayizem Dalinjong, Senior Health Researcher Officer, Navrongo Health Research Centre, Ghana Health Service, Ghana
Mr G.D. Dayaratne, Manager, Health Economic Policy Unit, Institute of Policy Studies of Sri Lanka, Sri Lanka

Dr Manuela De Allegri, Associate Professor, Researcher, Institute of Public Health - Heidelberg University, Germany

Mr Kristof Decoster, IHP editor, Institute of Tropical Medicine, Antwerp, Belgium

Mr Jean-Luc Dékaï, Consultant in Health Economics NAMOU, Groupe Innovation et Système de santé en Afrique, Sénégal

Dr Raywat Deonandan, Assistant Professor, University of Ottawa, Canada

Mr Mamadou Diaw, Associate Peace Corps Director for Health/PhD Candidate University of Versailles Saint Quentin Peace Corps, Senegal

Ms Clare Dickinson, Global Health Consultant, Network of International Consultants in Health and Development, France

Dr Prudence Ditlopo, Researcher, Centre for Health Policy, University of the Witwatersrand, South Africa

Mr Fahdi Dkhimi, Technical Officer, World Health Organization, France

Mr Joseph Dodoo, Health Policy Analyst, Ministry of Health, Ghana

Ms Jane Doherty, Independent Researcher and Lecturer, Wits School of Public Health, South Africa

Dr Michela D’Onofrio, Consultant, Global Institute for Water, Environment, and Health (GIWEH), Switzerland

Professor Dr Eddy Van Doorslaer, Professor of Health Economics, Erasmus University Rotterdam, The Netherlands

Dr Yohana Dukhan, Senior Health Economist, Management Sciences for Health, United States

Dr Jennifer Durandt, Family Doctor, University of Cape Town, South Africa

Dr Ejemai Eboreime, Health Policy and Systems Specialist, National PHC Development Agency, Nigeria

Professor Simon Eckermann, Professor of Health Economics, Australian health Services Research Institute, University of Wollongong, Australia

Dr Echoka Elizabeth, Senior Research Officer, Kenya Medical Research Institute, Kenya

Mr Gatera Emmanuel, PBF Cross Verification Team Leader, H.D.P, Congo Brazzaville

Mr Thomas Engels, Health Economist, Sightsavers, United Kingdom

Professor Tim Ensror, Professor of Health Systems Research, University of Leeds, United Kingdom

Dr Patrick Eozenou, Senior Economist, World Bank, Health Nutrition and Population Global Practice, United States

Dr Mafuta Eric, Senior Lecturer, Ecole de Sante Publique de Kinshasa, Democratic Republic of the Congo

Dr Ubanus Ezekiel, Director Health Planning Research and Statistics, Taraba State Primary Health Care Development Agency, Nigeria

Dr Charles C. Ezenduka, Lecturer/Researcher Health Economics/Pharmacoeconomics, Nnamdi Azikiwe University, Awka, Nigeria

Dr J.B. Falisse, Lecturer, Edinburgh University, United Kingdom

Dr Sophie Faye, Health Economist, Health Finance and Governance project/ Abt Associates Inc., United States

Dr Galbert Fedjo, Technical Assistant, Belgian Development Agency, Uganda

Ms Erin Felton, Director, Charlie Goldsmith Associates, United Kingdom

Dr Ama Fenny, Research Fellow, Institute of Statistical, Social and Economic Research, University of Ghana
Ms Erin Fenton, Senior Associate, Results for Development Institute, United States
Dr Giulia Ferrari, Research Fellow, London School of Hygiene and Tropical Medicine, United Kingdom
Dr Gabriela Flores, Health Economist, World Health Organization, Switzerland
Dr Lisa Forman, Assistant Professor, Dalla Lana School of Public Health, University of Toronto, Canada
Ms Nicola Foster, Research Fellow, Health Economics Unit, University of Cape Town, South Africa
Professor James Garden, Dean International and Regius Professor of Clinical Surgery, University of Edinburgh, United Kingdom
Dr Bertha Garshong, Deputy Director, Ghana Health Service, Ghana
Mr Michele Sechi Gatta, Health Economist, Consultant, Italy
Dr Aad van Geldermalsen, Consultant in Public Health, WHO Juba, South Sudan
Dr Jasmine Gideon, Senior Lecturer, Development Studies, Birkbeck, University of London, United Kingdom
Professor Lucy Gilson, Health Policy and Systems Division/Dept. Global Health and Development, University of Cape Town/London School of Hygiene and Tropical Medicine, South Africa/United Kingdom
Mr Ndiangui Githinji, Manager Quality Assurance, National Hospital Insurance Fund, Kenya
Ms Sue Godt, Senior Programme Officer, International Development Research Centre, Kenya
Professor Goedele, Adjunct Professor Public Health Medicine, University of Pretoria, South Africa
Ms Sarah E.B. Goltz MPH MIA, Principal, Sage Innovation, United States
Dr Arbi Gomati, Director of Health Financing Affairs, Ministry of Health, Libya
Dr Anna C Gorter, Epidemiologist, Consultant, Netherlands
Mrs Marielle Phe Goursat, Social Health Protection Specialist, International Labor Organization, Zambia
Dr Liz Grant, Assistant Principal Global Health, Director Global Health Academy, University of Edinburgh, Scotland, United Kingdom
Dr Karen Grépin, Associate Professor, Wilfrid Laurier University, Canada
Dr Alioune Badara Gueye, Training and Case Management Officer, NMCP, Senegal
Ms Teresa Guthrie, Health Economist, Consultant, South Africa
Mr Gwati Gwati, Planning and Donor Coordinator (Health Economist), Ministry of Health and Child Care, Zimbabwe
Dr Desire Habonimana MD, Implementation Scientist and Researcher, University of Burundi, Yowli, Burundi
Professor Slim Haddad, Professor of Public Health, Universite Laval, Canada
Professor Sir Andy Haines, Professor of Public Health and Primary Care, London School of Hygiene and Tropical Medicine, United Kingdom
Dr Alex Hakuzimana, Consultant and PhD Fellow, University of Cape Town, South Africa
DrPH Naomi Hamada, Senior Researcher, CSJ consultancy, Japan
Dr Rachel Hammonds, Post-Doctoral Researcher, Law and Development Research Group, Law Faculty, University of Antwerp, Belgium
Professor Kara Hanson, Professor of Health Economics, London School of Hygiene and Tropical Medicine, United Kingdom
Mr Tom Hart, Research Fellow, Overseas Development Institute, United Kingdom
Dr Laurel E. Hatt, Senior Health Economist, Abt Associates, United States
Professor Derek Adriaan Hellenberg, Head, Division of Family Medicine, University of Cape Town, South Africa
Dr Mark Hellowell, Senior Lecturer, University of Edinburgh, United Kingdom
Dr Patricia Hernandez-Peña, Researcher/Health Consultant, Netherlands Interdisciplinary Demographic Institute, The Netherlands
Dr Godelieve van Heteren MD, Academic Director, Erasmus University Rotterdam, The Netherlands
Dr Judith Heyer, Social Science Researcher, Oxford University, Contemporary South Asia Programme, United Kingdom
Dr Beverly Lorraine Ho, Chief Research Division, Department of Health, Philippines
Dr Justine Hoffman, Municipal Director of Health Services, Ghana Health Service, Ghana
Dr Ayako Honda, Senior Lecturer, Health Economics Unit, University of Cape Town, South Africa
Professor Charles Hongoro, Research Director, Population Health, Health Systems & Innovation, Human Sciences Research Council, South Africa
Mr Ronald Horstman, Director, Public Health Consultants, Netherlands
Professor Hyacinth Ichoku, Health Economist Lecturer and Researcher, University of Nigeria, Nsukka, Nigeria
Dr Marie-Gloriose Ingabire, Senior Program Specialist, International Development Research Centre, Canada
Dr Patrick G. Ilboudo, Senior Health Economist, Regional Office of the Agence de Medecine Preventive (AMP), Cote d'Ivoire
Dr Jean-Pierre Kashala Ilunga, Technical Adviser, Support Programme for the Health Sector/PASS SOUROU, Benin
Dr Wayne Irava, Associate Professor, Fiji national university, Fiji
Ms Nehal Jain, Consultant, Foundation for Research in Health Systems, India
Dr Hyobum Jang, Fellow, World Health Organization, Samoa
Dr Dossou Jean-Paul, Research Fellow, Centre de Recherche en Reproduction Humaine et en Démographie, Cotonou, Benin, and Institute of Tropical Medicine, Belgium
Mr Erik Josephson, Health Financing Consultant, United States
Ms Ouko Julia, Senior Benefits Officer, National Hospital Insurance Fund, Kenya
Mr Miloud Kaddar, Health Economist, Maghreb Health Economics Network, Algeria
Dr Berlin Kafoa, Associate Dean, College of Medicine, Nursing and Health Sciences (CMNHS), Fiji National University, Fiji
Dr Mpuma Kamanga, National Social Health Insurance Coordinator, Ministry of Health, Zambia
Dr Anuj Kapilashrami, Lecturer in Global Health Policy, University of Edinburgh, United Kingdom
Mr Edward Kataika, Director of Programmes, ECSA Health Community, Tanzania
Dr Sourou Béatrice Goufođi Keke MD, Director, Centre de Recherche en Reproduction Humaine et en Démographie, Cotonou/Benin
Ms Allison Gamble Kelley, Health Economist and Senior Facilitator, Financial Access to Health Community of Practice, France
Dr Ingrid Kelters, Health Coordinator, NGO, Netherlands
Mr Pratik Khanal, Research Associate, Nepal Health Research Council, Nepal
Dr Nyika Mahachi, Deputy Chief of Party, FHI360, Zimbabwe
Ms Mathilde Maifert, Health Financing Consultant, Philippines
Mr Mark Malema, Health Financing and Reform TA, Option Consultancy Ltd, Malawi
Mrs Patience Ami Mamattah, District Director of Health, Ghana Health Service (Kpone Katamanso District), Ghana
Ms Masuma Mamdani, Chief Research Scientist, Ifakara Health Institute, Tanzania
Dr Kate Mandeville, Honorary Clinical Lecturer, London School of Hygiene and Tropical Medicine, United Kingdom
Mrs Carlyn Mann, Research Analyst in Health Financing and Health System Strengthening, Harvard T.H. Chan School of Public Health, United States
Dr Marie-Claude Martin, Director, Special Initiatives, Fraser Mustard Institute for Human Development, University of Toronto, Canada
Dr Fred Martineau, Clinical Research Fellow, London School of Hygiene and Tropical Medicine, United Kingdom
Dr Melisa Martinez-Alvarez, Assistant Professor, London School of Hygiene and Tropical Medicine, United Kingdom
Mr Wilson Mashange, Public Health Researcher, Biomedical Research and Training Institute, Zimbabwe
Dr Thandiwe Mashunye, Medical Doctor and Master of Public Health Student, University of Cape Town, South Africa
Dr Nyasha Masuka, Provincial Medical Director, Ministry of Health and Child Care, Zimbabwe
Mrs Umuhoza Stella Matutina, Assistant Lecturer, University of Rwanda School of Public Health, Rwanda
Dr David McCoy, Senior Clinical Academic, Queen Mary University London
Professor Heather McLeod, Honorary Senior Research Fellow, University of Auckland, New Zealand
Professor Di McIntyre, Professor of Health Economics and South African Research Chair in ‘Health and Wealth’, University of Cape Town, South Africa
Professor Martin McKee, Professor of European Public Health, London School of Hygiene & Tropical Medicine
Mr Nyandekwe Medard MPH, Independent Senior Consultant and Researcher in Health and Social Health Protection, School of Public Health, College of Medicine and Health Sciences, University of Rwanda, Rwanda
Professor Bruno Meessen, Professor of Health Economics, Institute of Tropical Medicine, Belgium
Professor Qingyue Meng, Dean, Peking University School of Public Health, China
Dr Amin Mubarak Merghani, Head of Policy Unit, Public Health Institute, Sudan
Dr Sharmila Mhatre, Deputy Director, Public Health Program, Open Society Foundations, United States
Professor Anneli Milen, Professor in Global Health and Development, University of Tampere, Finland
Professor Anne Mills, Professor of Health Economics and Policy, London School of Hygiene and Tropical Medicine, United Kingdom
Dr John Nkrumah Mills, Vice-President, Ghana College of Physicians and Surgeons, Ghana
Dr Andrew J. Mirelman, Research Fellow, Centre for Health Economics, University of York, United Kingdom
Dr Bashir Mohamed, Director, Population Coverage Directorate, National Health Insurance Fund, Sudan
Dr Mohammed, Director General of Planning and Research, National Health Insurance Fund, Sudan
Dr Azaheer Ali Molla, PhD candidate, Public Health (Health Policy), Oregon State University, United States
Ms Femke Morrison, Centre for Medical Education, Scotland, United Kingdom
Dr C. van Mosseveld, Senior Health Care Researcher/ Health Consultant, The Netherlands
Dr Paola Mosquera, Marie Curie Postdoc, Umeå University, Sweden
Ms Sandra Mounier-Jack, Associate Professor in Health Policy, London School of Hygiene and Tropical Medicine, United Kingdom
Dr Gemini Mtei, Health Economist, Abt Associates Inc, Tanzania
Mrs Diane Muhongerwa, Health Economics Programme Officer, World Health Organization, Rwanda
Mr Stephen Kikwe Mulupi, African Population and Health Research Center, Kenya
Dr Jorine Muiser, PhD Researcher/Teacher, Universidad de Costa Rica, Costa Rica
Ms Munkhtsetseg B., Officer in Charge of Policy and Planning of Health Economics and Financing, Ministry of Health, Mongolia
Dr Fernando Munoz, Associate Professor, School of Public Health, Universidad de Chile, Chile
Ms Sarah Murali, Community Mobilization Lead, World Pulse, United States
Professor Scott Murray, Prof of Primary Palliative Care, University of Edinburgh, Scotland
Professor Susan F Murray, Professor of Health, Society & Development, King's College London, United Kingdom
Dr Ahmed Mustafa, Deputy Director, Health Economics Unit, Ministry of Health and Family Welfare, Bangladesh
Mr Chris Mweemba, Lecturer and Researcher, Health Policy and Management Unit, University of Zambia, Zambia
Dr Leon Paul Nadiele, Santé Publique / Economie de la santé, Hôpital Principal de Dakar, Chef Département Information Hospitalière, Senegal
Dr Patiphak Namahoot, Associate Director, National Health Security Office Region 3 Nakhonsawan, Thailand
Ms Iboro Nelson, Development & Health Economics Researcher, University of Uyo, Nigeria
Dr Chiu-Wan Ng, Associate Professor, Department of Social and Preventive Medicine, Faculty of Medicine, University of Malaya, Malaysia
Ms Cebisile Ngcamphalala, Research Officer, ICAP-Swaziland, Swaziland
Ms Sara Nieuwoudt, Lecturer, University of the Witwatersrand, School of Public Health, South Africa
Dr Gustavo Nigenda, Research Coordinator, School of Medicine, State of Morelos Autonomous University, Mexico
Dr Stephanie Nixon, Director, International Centre for Disability and Rehabilitation, University of Toronto, Canada
Mr Mathieu Noirhomme, Consultant in health policies, policy dialogue, and health systems strengthening, Mathieu Noirhomme SCS, Belgium
Dr Jacob Novignon, Lecturer and Health Economist, Kwame Nkrumah University of Science and Technology, Ghana
Dr Bernice M. Nsitou, PhD Student Public Health, University of Montréal, Canada
Mr Leonard Ntakarutimana, Researcher, National Institute of Public Health, INSP, Burundi
Dr Nazik Nurelhuda, Assistant professor in dental Public Health, University of Khartoum, Sudan
Dr Ifeoma Nzewi Obi, Clinical Pharmacist, Lagos University Teaching Hospital, Nigeria
Mr Felix Abrahams Obi, Research Fellow, Health Policy Research Group, Nigeria
Mrs Kafayat Oboirien, PhD Fellow, Centre for Health Policy, University of the Witwatersrand, South Africa
Dr Amarech Obse, Post-doctoral research fellow, University of Cape Town, South Africa
Ms Grace Odeke, Executive Director, Alias-Women Our Roots, Uganda
Professor Owen O'Donnell, Professor of Applied Economics, Erasmus University Rotterdam, The Netherlands
Professor Juhwan Oh, Professor of International Health Policy and Management, Seoul National University College of Medicine, Republic of Korea
Professor, Eileen O'Keefe, Emeritus Professor of Public Health, London Metropolitan University, United Kingdom
Dr Dickson R O Okello, Doctoral Candidate, University of Cape Town, South Africa
Mr Chijioke Okoli, Lecturer, Health Economist & Researcher, University of Nigeria - Enugu Campus, Nigeria
Dr Vincent Okungu, Senior Lecturer, Strathmore University, Kenya
Dr Yetunde Olagbuiji, Consultant Public Health Physician, Director of Planning Research and Statistics, Ondo State Primary Health Care Development Board, Akure, Nigeria
Dr Saheed Olayiwola, Lecturer, Federal University of Technology, Akure and Health Policy Research and Training Programme, Department of Economics, University of Ibadan, Nigeria
Professor Colleen O'Manique, Associate Professor, International Development Studies, Trent University, Canada
Dr Arnold Onana, MPH candidate 2017, Johns Hopkins Bloomberg School of Public Health, United States
Mr Elkana Ong'uti, Chief Economist, Ministry of Health, Kenya
Dr Chima Onoka, Health Systems Economist & Community Health Physician, University of Nigeria, Nigeria
Dr Trygve Ottersen, Associate Professor, University of Oslo, Norway
Dr Ouattara Oumar, Consultant, Mali
Dr Badri Raj Pande, President, Nepal Health Economics Association, Nepal
Professor Guillermo Paraje, Professor of Economics, Universidad Adolfo Ibanez, Chile
Dr Divya Parmar, Lecturer, City University of London, United Kingdom
Dr Remco van de Pas, Research Fellow Global Health Policy, Institute of Tropical Medicine, Department of Public Health, Antwerp, Belgium
Dr Walaiporn Patcharanarumol, Researcher, International Health Policy Program (IHPP), Ministry of Public Health, Thailand
Dr Elisabeth Paul, Research Associate, Lecturer, Université de Liège, Belgium
Dr Etienne Minzah Pekele, National Health Systems Expert, World Health Organization, Togo
Dr Nerisha Pillay, Psychiatry Registrar, University of Cape Town, South Africa
Ms Catherine Pitt, Assistant Professor of Health Economics, London School of Hygiene and Tropical Medicine, United Kingdom
Mr Klaus D Pluemer, Social Economist, Independent Consultant Public Health & Health Promotion, Germany
Dr Kevin Pottie, Associate Professor, Bruyere Research Institute, University of Ottawa, Canada
Mr Ronesh Prasad, Health Economist, Centre for Health Information, Policy & Systems Research, College of Medicine, Nursing & Health Sciences, Fiji National University, Fiji
Dr Jennifer Rasanathan, Program Officer, Open Society Foundations, United States
Professor K. Srinath Reddy, President, Public Health Foundation of India, India
Dr Attia Akissi Régine, Assistant Professor in Public Health, Université Félix Houphouët Boigny, Côte d'Ivoire
Ms Michelle Remme, Assistant Professor, London School of Hygiene and Tropical Medicine, United Kingdom
Professor Valéry Ridde, Professor, University of Montreal, Canada
Ms Arjanne Rietsema, Director Country Office, Cordaid, Zimbabwe
Dr Emilie Robert, Postdoctoral fellow, McGill University, Canada
Professor Janet Hatcher Roberts, Co Director, WHO Collaborating Centre for Knowledge Translation, Technology Assessment for Health Equity, Canada
Dr Jose Manuel Roche, Chief Researcher, Save the Children, United Kingdom
Ms Avelina Rokoduru, Research Centre Coordinator, Pacific Sexual & Reproductive Health Research Centre, College of Medicine, Nursing & Health Sciences, Fiji National University, Fiji
Professor Irving Rootman, Adjunct Professor, University of Victoria, Canada
Dr Erica Di Ruggiero, Assistant Professor, University of Toronto, Canada
Mr Itai Rusike, Coordinator, African Platform for Universal Health Coverage (AP-UHC), Zimbabwe
Dr Anwar Sadat, Focal Person of PER, Health Economics Unit, Bangladesh
Dr Ouassa Sanogo, Coordinatrice de programme santé, ONG, Mali
Dr Andreia Santos, Assistant Professor in Health Economics, London School of Hygiene and Tropical Medicine, United Kingdom
Dr Charity Sarpong, Regional Director of Health Service, Ghana Health Service, Ghana
Dr Ssem遗迹, Head of Division, Ministry of Health, Morocco
Dr Maya Semrau Post-doctoral Researcher, King's College London, United Kingdom
Dr Patti Shih, Postdoctoral Research Fellow, Australian Institute of Health Innovation, Macquarie University, Australia
Dr Mahesh Shukla, Senior Technical Adviser, Management Sciences for Health, United States
Dr Prashant Kumar Singh, Assistant Professor, Department of Policy Studies, TERI University, India
Dr Suneeta Singh, CEO, Amaltas Consulting Pvt Ltd, India
Mr Justin Adamavokin Sossou, Membre du GTT/ Régime Assurance Maladie Bénin, Économiste de la Santé, Secrétariat Général Adjoint, Ministère de la Santé du Bénin, République du Bénin
Dr Ngueann, Tenguel Sosthene, Sociologist, Health Economics, University of Nangui Abrogoua, Cote d'Ivoire
Dr Donruedee Srisuppaphon, Research fellow, International Health Policy Program, Thailand
Dr Aloysius Ssennyonjo, Project Manager, SPEED/Research Fellow, Makerere University School of Public Health, Uganda
Dr David Stevenson, Honorary Fellow, Population Health Sciences, University of Edinburgh, Scotland
Professor Frances Stewart, Emeritus professor of development economics, Oxford Department of International Development, United Kingdom
Dame Barbara Stocking, President, Murray Edwards College, University Of Cambridge, United Kingdom
Mr Jonathan Stokes, Research Associate, The University of Manchester, United Kingdom
Dr Kanitsorn Sumriddetchkajorn, Director, International Affairs on UHC, National Health Security Office, Thailand
Ms Waraporn Suwanwela, Director of Bureau of Policy and Strategy Development, National Health Security Office (NHSO), Thailand
Dr Roberto Talongwa, Programme Manager, Plan International, Cameroon
Mr Eric Tama, Research Officer, Kemri-Wellcome Trust Research Programme, Kenya
Mr Asahngwa Tanywe, Centre Director, Cameroon Centre for Evidence-Based Health Care, Cameroon
Dr Hyacinthe Kankeu Tchewonpi, Research Fellow, Centre for Health Economics, University of York, United Kingdom
Dr Gina Teddy, Ag. Director of CHESPOR, Ghana Institute of Management and Public Administration, Ghana
Dr Fabrizio Tediosi, Research Group Leader, Swiss TPH, Switzerland
Dr Fern Terris-Prestholt, Associate Professor in the Economics of HIV, London School of Hygiene and Tropical Medicine, United Kingdom
Mr Moses Tetui, Research Fellow, Makerere University School of Public Health, Uganda
Dr Aboubacry Thiam, Country Director, Helen Keller International Senegal Country Office, Senegal
Dr Michael Thiede, Director, Scenarium Group GmbH, Germany
Dr Joanne Thompson, Senior Lecturer, University of Edinburgh, United Kingdom
Dr Abdelmajid Tibouti, Former UNICEF Senior Adviser, AMT Consulting, Canada
Dr Yaya Togo, Public Health Researcher, Faculty of Medicine of Bamako and CREDOS, Mali
Professor Steve Tollman, Director, MRC / Wits University Rural Public Health and Health Transitions Research Unit, South Africa
Mr Lluis Vinyals Torres, Health Financing Regional Adviser, World Health Organisation, India
Dr Nkolika Uguru, Senior Lecturer (Health Economist and Dental Public Health Specialist), University of Nigeria, Nigeria
Professor Uzochukwu BSC, Public Health Physician and Director Institute of Public Health, College of Medicine, University of Nigeria Nsukka, Enugu campus, Nigeria
Ms Sephy Valuks, London School of Hygiene & Tropical Medicine, United Kingdom
Dr Linda Amarkai Vanotoo, Regional Director of Health Service, Ghana Health Service, Ghana
Professor Anna Vassall, Professor in Health Economics, London School of Hygiene and Tropical Medicine, United Kingdom
Dr Roman Vega-Romero, Professor, Javeriana University, Colombia
Professor Ventelou, Researcher, Aix Marseille School of Economics, France
Mrs Ida Verspohl, Evaluator, DEval - German Institute for Development Evaluation, Germany
Dr Vijayabaskar.M, Associate Professor, Madras Institute of Development Studies, India
Dr Adam Wagstaff, Research Manager, World Bank, United States
Professor Gill Walt, Emeritus Professor of International Health Policy, London School of Hygiene and Tropical Medicine, United Kingdom
Mr Elvis Omondi Achach Wambiya, Epidemiology (Implementation Science) Fellow/ Researcher, University of the Witwatersrand, South Africa
Mr Jess Wilhelm, PhD Candidate, Johns Hopkins School of Public Health, United States
Mr Florence William MPATA, M&E Specialist, MSH, Democratic Republic of Congo
Dr Owain Williams, Senior Research Fellow in Global Health, University of Queensland, Australia
Ms Pauline Wilson, International Development Consultant, United Kingdom
Dr Sophie Witter, Professor of International Health Financing and Systems, Queen Margaret University, Edinburgh, United Kingdom
Professor Mirkuzie Woldie, Vice President, Jimma University Institute of Health, Ethiopia
Mr Robert Yates, Project Director, UHC Policy Forum, Chatham House, United Kingdom
Dr Bruno Lule Yawe, Senior Lecturer, Makerere University, Uganda
Dr Francisco J Yepes, Professor, Pontificia Universidad Javeriana, Instituto de Salud Pública, Colombia
Dr Volkan Yilmaz, Assistant Professor of Social Policy, Bogazici University, Turkey
Professor Winnie Yip, Professor of Global Health Policy and Economics, Harvard TH Chan School of Public Health, United States
Dr Saidou Yonaba MD, Health Economist, Secrétariat Général Caisse d'Assurance Maladie, enseignant à l'Institut Africain de Santé Publique, Ministère de la Défense, Burkina Faso
Dr Adam Zakillatou MD, Ministry of Health, Togo
Dr Arianna Zanolini, Zambia Country Director, American Institutes for Research, Zambia
Professor Christina Zarowsky, Directrice, Département de médecine sociale et préventive, École de santé publique de l'Université de Montréal, Canada
Mr Andre Zida, Associate Scientist, Abt Associate INC, Burkina Faso
Ms Tryphine Zulu, National Health Insurance Workstreams Coordinator & PhD candidate in Health Economics, National Department of Health/University of Cape Town, South Africa
Ms Eva Helena Zver MSc, Health Policy Analyst, Institute of Macroeconomic Analysis and Development, Slovenia
Dr Virginia Zweigenthal, Public Health Medicine specialist, University of Cape Town, South Africa