

Universal Health Care Systems: Universal Access or Universal Coverage?

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The Brazilian Constitution imposed on the State the duty to guarantee each citizen the right to health care, which is considered a fundamental right (art. 6 of the Constitution). Health is the right of all persons and the duty of the State and it is guaranteed by means of social and economic policies aimed at reducing the risk of illness and allowing access to actions and services for promotion, protection and recovery of health. In consequence the right to health and the guarantee to it has always been openly discussed.

Many would be the issues to be addressed on the State's role regarding the obligations the right to health entails as it is a right encompassing multiple meanings and high costs. How to ensure and what actions and services to guarantee in order to protect everyone rights, based on the State financial capacity is the debate gnawing the Brazilian society and the State up to the present and the reason of an strong judicialization of health as no consensus has been achieved by the Judiciary as for the provisions of the National List of Actions and Health Services (RENASES) and National Drug List (RENAME).

When it comes to the duty of State with respect to the right to health *stricto sensu* which in Brazil is not yet consolidated in the face of great difficulties the issue encompasses, it is necessary to consider that recently the differences that may exist between universal coverage and the guarantee to universal access have been brought into discussion. A seemingly semantic debate that surprises when deeply examining the subject as it encompasses a paradigm shift both in the way of designing the public health system itself and ensuring services delivery to citizens.

The difference lies on a first model which imposes on the State the provision of public services guided by National Policies and Guidelines and a second model in which the State must foment both market and society to provide adequate fee-based health care services and guarantee free health care access to those who cannot afford the cost of said services. The models differ essentially from each other as in the

first one - universal coverage - free-cost health actions and services are not mandatory, while under the universal access system services are provided in a gratuitous manner by the State.

The role of the State in guaranteeing the right to health must be deeply discussed as health policies in Brazil will be violated if the universal coverage concept is adopted instead of the universal access system. These differences must be discussed in order to clarify the concept and the understanding of what changes would be necessary in the Brazilian Legislation.

We know that international organizations increasingly share the idea that the universality of guaranteeing the right to health does not mean the State must itself provide health services to the population, on condition that the market is able to provide sufficient services and welfare programs are available for those who cannot afford fee-based services.

The discussion needs to achieve transparency on the specificities of each model and involve health councils - participatory democracy - in order to clarify the dichotomy between both concepts: universal access and universal coverage raised in international discussions. Differences between the concepts are: health services provided by the market in the first model and on the other hand health services provided by the State, which also plays a strong regulatory role, besides controlling health actions and services, whether of public or private ownership.

Times are difficult to concretize high-cost social rights such as health care. Thus a profound sense of belonging in order to support public health universal access is required. In times of difficulty when market pressures increase, social issues must be approached with a redoubled vigilance. It is important to debate and clearly define the concepts in order to make the right decision as it impacts all society levels especially when it comes to health and its connection to life.

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