



A BOLD AND INDEPENDENT VOICE FOR THE RIGHTS OF WOMEN AND GIRLS

Statement of the International Women's Health Coalition

144th session of the Executive Board

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Agenda Item 5.5.3 Preparation for the high-level meeting of the General Assembly on universal health coverage

The International Women's Health Coalition (IWHC) believes that universal health coverage has transformative potential to achieve the goal of healthy lives for all. To do so, governments must design universal health coverage programs in ways that protect human rights, address inequalities, including gender inequality, and that meet the particular needs of women, adolescents, and marginalized communities. In particular, universal health coverage must provide a level of financial protection sufficient to insulate women and girls against economic hardship by including a full range of sexual and reproductive health services in essential benefits packages; strengthening primary health care systems; and ensuring that the most marginalized—women employed in the informal sector, women living in poverty, adolescent girls, older women, migrant women, indigenous women, and lesbian, bisexual, and transgender people, among others—do not fall through due to a lack of resources, autonomy, power, or information.

Governments must also address the myriad other barriers to accessing health care services, even when there is universal coverage, such as discrimination; laws that criminalize certain services, such as abortion; third party authorization requirements, such as parental or spousal consent; lack of information, education, and decision-making power; and health care workers that refuse care on the basis of their personal beliefs. Governments must also commit to strengthening health care work forces so that they can provide quality services, which includes ensuring that women employed in

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the health sector enjoy decent work, social protection, ongoing training, and can advance to leadership positions.

At this Executive Board, it is important that governments set a high bar for the outcome of the high level meeting, one that will aspire to ensure access to comprehensive, quality health services and the right to the highest attainable standard of health for all women and girls.