

What is the Human Right to Health?

Every person has basic human rights that are common to all human beings, regardless of sex, race, ethnicity, national origin, language, income, religion, sexuality, age, or disability. These rights are the same for everyone, and they exist independent of government recognition.

The human right to health means that everyone has the right to the highest attainable standard of physical and mental health, which includes access to medical care, healthy food, water, sanitation, decent housing, healthy working conditions, and a clean environment. In so far as all these are shaped by society, government has an obligation to protect our health and to help us be as healthy as possible.

- The human right to health **guarantees a system of health protection** for all.
- Everyone has the right to the health care they need, and to living conditions that enable us to be healthy, such as adequate food, housing, and a healthy environment.
- Health care must be provided as a public good for all, financed publicly and equitably. We have a right to get the health care we need, and a responsibility to ensure that everyone else can do the same.

Key Principles of the Human Right to Health Care

The human right to health care means that hospitals, clinics, medicines and doctor's services must be **accessible, available, acceptable**, and of good **quality** for everyone, on an equitable basis, where and when needed.

- ▶ **Universality:** Everyone must have access to equal high-quality and comprehensive health care.
- ▶ **Equity:** Resources and services must be distributed and accessed according to people's needs. We get what we need and give what we can.
- ▶ **Accountability:** The health care system must be accountable to the people it serves.
- ▶ **Transparency:** The health care system must be open with regard to information, decision-making, and management.
- ▶ **Participation:** The health care system must enable meaningful public participation in all decisions affecting people's right to health care.

These human rights principles set the parameters for health care reform. They enable advocates to raise the bar for reform efforts and develop a roadmap for moving toward a health care system in which everyone in the United States is able to get the care they need.

Where is the Human Right to Health Recognized?

- Universal Declaration of Human Rights (Article 25)*
- American Declaration on the Rights and Duties of Man (Article 11) *
- International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (Article 12)
- Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination (Article 5) *
- Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (Articles 12 & 14)
- Convention on the Rights of the Child (Article 24)
- Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (Article 25)

* The United States has committed to these Declarations and Conventions.