

# Harmonizing Healthcare Accreditation Standards with WHO's Universal Health Coverage Goals

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**Abstract:** *This study explores the alignment between standards set by international and national healthcare accreditation bodies and the World Health Organization's (WHO) Universal Health Coverage (UHC) goals for 2030. Through a thorough analysis of accreditation standards and healthcare professional interactions, key areas of congruence and divergence with UHC objectives are identified. The findings underscore the pivotal role of accreditation in advancing global health goals and provide strategic recommendations to better synchronize accreditation practices with UHC targets.*

**Keywords:** World Health Organization (WHO), Universal Health Coverage (UHC), Accreditation Bodies, Joint Commission International (JCI), Accreditation Canada International (ACI), National Accreditation Board for Hospitals & Healthcare Providers (NABH), Saudi Central Board for Accreditation of Healthcare Institutions (CBAHI), Australian Council on Healthcare Standards International (ACHSI), and Accreditation Association for Ambulatory Health Care International (AACI) and International Society for Quality in Health Care (ISQua).

## 1. Introduction

Universal Health Coverage (UHC) is a global initiative that aims to ensure all individuals have access to the healthcare services they need without facing financial hardship, as outlined by the World Health Organization (WHO) in 2020. The WHO has set a target to achieve UHC by 2030, with a focus on enhancing accessibility, quality, financial protection, and equity in healthcare<sup>1</sup>. Accreditation bodies such as the Joint Commission International (JCI), Accreditation Canada International (ACI), National Accreditation Board for Hospitals & Healthcare Providers (NABH), Saudi Central Board for Accreditation of Healthcare Institutions (CBAHI), Australian Council on Healthcare Standards International (ACHSI), and Accreditation Association for Ambulatory Health Care International (AACI) play a crucial role in establishing global standards that impact healthcare quality and accessibility.

## 2. Literature Review

Access to healthcare is a human right and the Universal Health Coverage (UHC) is the materialization of that right, embodying the commitment and promise that every human being should achieve the highest standard of health possible<sup>2</sup>. Achieving UHC involves addressing key objectives related to accessibility, quality, financial protection, and equity in healthcare. Healthcare accreditation bodies play a significant role in shaping the quality and accessibility of health services through their established standards. This literature review critically examines how international and national healthcare accreditation standards align with WHO's UHC goals for 2030.

Accessibility is a fundamental component of UHC, requiring health services to be geographically and economically reachable for all individuals. Accreditation bodies like JCI, ACI, and others incorporate standards that indirectly support accessibility by emphasizing patient-centered care and community health initiatives. For instance, Joint Commission International promotes patient-centered care, encouraging healthcare organizations to address the needs of their

communities and ensure services are accessible to all patients<sup>3</sup>. This approach aligns with the UHC goal of making health services available to all individuals, regardless of location or socioeconomic status. Similarly, Accreditation Canada International also highlights the importance of community health initiatives to improve access to services in underserved areas<sup>4</sup>. These initiatives are crucial for achieving the UHC objective of widespread service accessibility.

Quality of care is a core focus of both accreditation standards and UHC goals. Accreditation bodies emphasize continuous quality improvement, patient safety, and the implementation of evidence-based practices to ensure high standards of care. For example, Joint Commission International's extensive criteria for quality improvement and patient safety ensure that healthcare organizations adopt best practices and maintain high standards of care, aligning well with the WHO's emphasis on the effectiveness and efficiency of health services<sup>4</sup>. Similarly, the Australian Council on Healthcare Standards International focuses on quality and safety, promoting continuous improvement and adherence to evidence-based practices<sup>5</sup>. The International Society for Quality in Health Care underscores that quality encompasses not only clinical outcomes but also patient experiences and safety, reinforcing the alignment with UHC goals<sup>6</sup>.

Financial Protection aims to ensure that the cost of using health services does not lead to financial hardship. This component of UHC is less prominently addressed in existing accreditation standards while some standards include elements related to cost-efficiency and resource management, but they rarely address the broader issue of financial protection explicitly<sup>7</sup>.

Equity in healthcare ensures that services are available and accessible to all individuals, regardless of their socioeconomic status, ethnicity, gender, or geographic location. This aspect of UHC is essential for reducing health disparities and promoting social justice. Some accreditation bodies include standards that emphasize non-discriminatory practices and prioritize access to care for vulnerable populations<sup>5;8</sup>. These standards support the UHC goal of

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equitable health services. however, some accreditation highlights the importance of equitable access to care<sup>9</sup>.

While there is significant alignment between healthcare accreditation standards and WHO's UHC goals in terms of quality and accessibility, gaps remain in the areas of financial protection and equity.

### 3. Methodology

#### Research Design

A mixed-methods approach was employed to analyze healthcare accreditation standards. Quantitative analysis of accreditation standards from various international and national bodies was combined with qualitative insights from healthcare professionals.

#### Data Collection

Document Analysis: Accreditation standards from leading international and national bodies such as JCI, ACI, NABH, CBAHI, ACHSI, AACI, and ISQua were collected and reviewed.

Healthcare Professional Inputs: Inputs were collected from healthcare professionals involved in implementing these accreditation standards globally.

### 4. Data Analysis

Quantitative Analysis focused on evaluating the alignment of accreditation standards with key UHC components of Universal Health Coverage such as accessibility, quality, financial protection, and equity<sup>1</sup>.

Qualitative Analysis is a thematic analysis of inputs from healthcare professionals to extract perspectives on the alignment of accreditation standards with UHC goals for 2030.

### 5. Results

#### Alignment with UHC Components

The result indicates that many accreditation standards indirectly support accessibility through requirements for patient-centered care and community health initiatives. Furthermore, the standards emphasize quality improvement and patient safety, which align well with UHC's objectives for effective healthcare services. however, fewer international and national standards explicitly address financial protection, though some include elements related to cost-efficiency and resource management. The study also highlights that promoting equity is less prominent in some standards, but some accreditation bodies emphasize non-discriminatory practices and access to care for vulnerable populations such as JCI, ACI, NABH, CBAHI, ACHSI, and AACI.

#### Expert Insights

All Accreditation bodies excel in promoting quality and safety, which are crucial components for achieving Universal Health Coverage (UHC). Their efforts contribute significantly to ensuring the delivery of high-quality healthcare services while prioritizing patient safety. Despite their commendable work in promoting quality and safety,

there is a noticeable gap in the standards set by accreditation bodies that explicitly address financial protection and equity. This gap is observed across accreditation bodies such as JCI, ACI, NABH, CBAHI, ACHSI, and AACI. The absence of explicit standards focusing on financial protection and equitable access represents a significant area for improvement within the accreditation process.

There is an opportunity to enhance the impact of accreditation bodies on Universal Health Coverage by incorporating standards that specifically target financial protection and equitable access.

### 6. Discussion

The analysis indicates substantial alignment between accreditation standards and UHC goals in terms of quality and accessibility. However, significant gaps remain in addressing financial protection and equity. Accreditation bodies have the potential to play a more proactive role in advancing UHC by integrating these aspects into their standards. By addressing these aspects, accreditation bodies can further contribute to the advancement of UHC and ensure that healthcare services are not only of high quality and safe but also financially accessible and equitable for all individuals.

### 7. Recommendations

- **Incorporate Financial Protection:** Accreditation standards should explicitly address financial aspects to prevent healthcare services from imposing undue financial burdens on patients.
- **Promote Equity:** Develop and implement standards that specifically target equitable access to healthcare, ensuring services are available to all population groups.
- **Collaborate with WHO:** Accreditation bodies should collaborate closely with WHO to align their standards with the latest UHC guidelines and targets.
- **Periodic Review and Update:** Regularly update accreditation standards to reflect evolving UHC goals and healthcare challenges.

### 8. Conclusion

This study highlights the essential role of healthcare accreditation bodies in supporting WHO's UHC goals. While there is significant alignment in the areas of quality and accessibility, targeted efforts are needed to address gaps in financial protection and equity. By more closely aligning with UHC objectives, accreditation bodies can significantly contribute to the global effort to achieve UHC by 2030.

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