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WHO: Invest in local research to improve healthcare

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Singapore: WHO has urged countries to invest in local research in order to develop a system of universal health coverage tailored to each individual country's situation to help ensure that citizens obtain the health services they need without suffering financial hardship when paying for them.

Dr Margaret Chan, director general, WHO, described universal coverage as the single most powerful concept that public health has to offer. While launching the 'World health report 2013: Research for universal health coverage', Dr Chan said that, "Universal coverage is the best way to cement the health gains made during the previous decade. It is a powerful social equalizer and the ultimate expression of fairness."

The report shows how countries, when developing a system for universal health coverage, can use research to determine what health issues should be addressed, how a system should be structured and how to measure progress according to their specific health situation.

The report reveals that, on average, domestic investment in research in low and middle-income countries has been growing five percent each year. This trend is most visible in emerging economies such as Brazil, China and India, all of which have embraced the concept of universal health coverage.Ã?Â Case studies from many countries demonstrate the importance of local and global research for improving health, ranging from the prevention and control of specific diseases to the better functioning of health systems.

"Research for universal health coverage is not a luxury; rather, it is fundamental to the discovery, development and delivery of

interventions that people need to maintain good health," the report noted.

"All nations should be producers as well as consumers of research. The creativity and skill of researchers are the backbone of academic and public health programs," said Dr Christopher Dye, director, Office of Health Information, HIV/AIDS, Tuberculosis, Malaria and Neglected Tropical Diseases, WHO, and lead author of the report.

"A wide range of basic and applied research studies is essential to reach universal health coverage, but gaps between knowledge and action are being closed very slowly. We need to accelerate the process of bringing scientists and decision makers together to improve health service coverage," Dr Dye added.