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The Intersection of Art and Health: Advocating for Universal Health Coverage

Purpose: The cornerstone of “ensuring healthy lives and promoting well-being for all ages” started with the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) set forth during the United Nations High-Level Meeting (UN HLM). These goals later transformed into the objective of achieving Universal Health Coverage (UHC). To connect the community to the delegates of the UN HLM, six key asks were developed through a three-month consultation with parliamentarians, civil society, private sector, agencies, networks, and academic institutions to achieve UHC objectives. These six key asks act as the foundation for coordinated advocacy efforts to promote UHC in preparation for the UN HLM.

Structure: On September 22, the day before the 74th UN HLM on UHC, the WHO held a 5-kilometer fun-run in Central Park, “Walk the Talk New York City: The Health Challenge for All”. A blank canvas was placed along the trail for four artists to collaboratively contribute. The exhibit included stationary photography, paintings, poetry, and stories that exemplified the importance of the six key asks. The goal of the exhibit was to curate a message to involve international delegates, community, and local artists in advocating for the six key asks.

Outcome: The event included nearly 2,000 participants of all ages and abilities including stakeholders such as the President of Palau, the President of the 74th General Assembly, the WHO Goodwill ambassador, and many others. After the event, art pieces were sent to the Millennium Hilton New York One UN Plaza to be displayed during the UN HLM Reception.

Lessons Learned: Art in public health can play an internationally integral role in addressing inequalities and social justice in health. By involving compelling ways to articulate social, economic, and cultural values, the policy-making arena can involve people who are routinely marginalized from the decision-making processes. There is an ongoing challenge to support art as part of achieving public health goals, this includes expressing the depth and importance that art plays in individual health outcomes.

