



18 August 2021, Cairo, Egypt — The World Health Organization (WHO) is committed to staying in Afghanistan and delivering critical health services and calls on all parties to respect and protect civilians, health workers, patients and health facilities. During this difficult time, the well-being of all civilians — as well as the safety and security of our staff — in Afghanistan is paramount.

Sustained access to humanitarian assistance, including essential health services and medical supplies, is a critical lifeline for millions of Afghans, and must not be interrupted. Months of violence have taken a heavy toll on Afghanistan’s fragile health system, which had already been

facing shortages in essential supplies amid the COVID-19 pandemic.

As a result of the recent conflict, trauma injuries have increased, requiring scaled up emergency medical and surgical services. In July 2021, some 13 897 conflict-related trauma cases were received at 70 WHO-supported health facilities, compared to 4057 cases in July 2020.

Despite the insecurity, on 17 August WHO dispatched to Wazir Akbar Khan Hospital in Kabul 33 units of different modules of trauma kits, enough to cover 500 surgical procedures for 500 trauma patients and 750 burn victims, and 10 basic medical kits enough to provide essential medicines for 10 000 people for 3 months.

This week, WHO also provided Helmand regional hospital with 6 basic medical supply kits and one cholera kit to support the provision of basic medicines for 6000 people for 3 months and the management of 100 cases of diarrhoea. In the past week, WHO has also donated medical supplies to 3 health partners to sustain critical work at their health facilities by covering gaps in availability.

Over the past 3 months, health staff in 10 referral hospitals have been provided with training in mass casualty management. Since January, WHO has provided trauma care support to 134 health facilities in 34 provinces. These hospitals have reported 20 988 trauma cases in the past 2 months. Since June, WHO provided 500 health facilities with emergency kits and medical supplies. WHO is also training health workers in mental health support.

WHO and partners have conducted an initial assessment of the health needs of displaced populations and have deployed 2 mobile health teams to provide medical services. However, interventions have been on hold for the past 36 hours due to insecurity.

In areas where people have fled to seek safety and shelter, including Kabul and other large cities, field reports indicate that there are increasing cases of diarrhoea, malnutrition, high blood pressure, COVID-19-like symptoms and reproductive health complications. Delays and disruptions to health care will increase the risk of disease outbreaks and prevent some of the most vulnerable groups from seeking life-saving health care. There is an immediate need to ensure continuity of health services across the country, with a focus on ensuring women have access to female health workers.

Furthermore, attacks on health care remain a major challenge. From January to July 2021, 26 health facilities and 31 health care workers were affected; 12 health workers were killed.

WHO continues to work with partners to respond to COVID-19 with a focus on diagnosis and testing, surveillance, clinical care, infection prevention and control, vaccination, and referrals for recently displaced people in major cities.

WHO's Regional vision of "health for all by all: a call for solidarity and action" has never been more relevant or more urgently needed than now.

The people of Afghanistan need support and solidarity today more than ever. The gains of the past 20 years cannot be turned back.

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