



8 December 2022 – To celebrate Universal Health Coverage (UHC) Day on 12 December and in line with the theme of this year “Build the World We Want: A Healthy Future for All”, the WHO Regional Office for the Eastern Mediterranean is organizing a meeting on primary health care (PHC) for universal health coverage (UHC) and health security in the Eastern Mediterranean Region from 11 to 15 December 2022.

The meeting will bring together more than 100 stakeholders from government, the private sector, donors, academia and the health sector to renew commitment to achieving UHC and health security. Participants will share country experiences on the role of PHC in health emergencies and highlight ongoing work and progress on various health initiatives. Meeting outcomes will include consensus on an agenda for implementation of needed actions to address the seven regional priorities to advance universal health coverage and ensure health security presented during the Sixty-ninth session of the Eastern Mediterranean Regional Committee Meeting in October 2022.

UHC means that all people have access to the health services they need, when and where they need them in good quality and without financial hardship. It includes the full range of essential health services, from health promotion to prevention, treatment, rehabilitation, and palliative care. It means that everyone has access to information and services to make healthier choices and prevent disease.

PHC is the most cost-effective way to bring services for health and well-being closer to individuals and communities. Reorienting health systems towards the PHC approach means engaging in multisectoral action, ensuring community engagement, increasing equitable access to quality health services and strengthening essential public health functions within a whole of society approach.

Discussion will focus on establishing the link between PHC and regional priorities to inform the development of a road map to put into action the key strategic and operational levers outlined in the “Operational Framework for Primary Health Care”. The meeting will also serve as an opportunity to prepare for the United Nations High-Level Meeting on Universal Health Coverage

scheduled to take place in September 2023.

All countries in WHO's Eastern Mediterranean Region committed to achieving UHC in 2015 as part of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development; however, much remains to be done to make this goal a reality. The theme of this year's UHC Day represents a step in achieving that goal as an opportunity to advocate for UHC and the critical role of PHC and health security.

It comes at a time when countries are rebuilding their health systems from the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic. In the words of Dr Ahmed Al-Mandhari, WHO Regional Director for the Eastern Mediterranean: "COVID-19, conflicts and climate change are now major challenges to UHC. The COVID-19 pandemic demonstrated the vulnerability of our health, social protection and economic systems but we witnessed how everyone: individuals, communities, public sector, private sector, civil society and others all came together to protect and promote health. We are certain about the future we all want to see – A Healthy Future for All – in line with our regional vision of Health for All by All."

In 2018, Member States endorsed the regional Salalah Declaration on UHC and the global Astana Declaration on PHC. Today, the countdown has begun to the second United Nations High-level Meeting on Universal Health Coverage in 2023 to strengthen commitment to building a world in which everyone, everywhere has the opportunity to live a healthy life and future.

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