



Kabul 5 February 2017 – New guidance from WHO launched ahead of World Cancer Day (4 February) aims to improve the chances of survival for people living with cancer by ensuring that health services can focus on diagnosing and treating the disease earlier. In Afghanistan, the prioritization of basic, high-impact and low-cost diagnosis and treatment services is crucial.

Recently released WHO figures indicate that each year 8.8 million people die from cancer, mostly in low- and middle-income countries. According to WHO estimates, there are around 15 000 new cancer cases every year in Afghanistan, which is likely to be an underestimation. Breast cancer is the most common type of cancer in the country, accounting for around 30% of all recorded cancers. Other common cancers include stomach, esophageal, cervical, uterine, lung, and lip and oral cancers.

Afghanistan faces challenges in terms of providing access to effective diagnostic services, including imaging, laboratory tests and pathology, which are all key to helping detect cancers and plan treatment. There are very limited facilities for the provision of cancer screening and treatment, both in the public and private sector.

“Prevention, early diagnosis and treatment of cancer and other noncommunicable diseases (NCDs) is among our key priorities. Effective early diagnosis saves lives as it can help detect cancer in patients at an earlier stage, enabling treatment that is generally more effective, less complex, and less expensive,” said Dr Richard Peeperkorn, WHO Country Representative.

With the support of WHO, the Ministry of Public Health has taken steps to address the cancer burden in Afghanistan. The National NCD Control Strategy of 2015–2020 stresses the importance of establishing a national cancer registry. Afghanistan's Reproductive Health Strategy highlights several objectives for cancer control and prevention, including a breast and cervical cancer registry, awareness-raising interventions, and advocacy for the early detection, treatment, and palliative care services.

Through the financial support of the Government of Italy, WHO supported the establishment of a mammography centre in Esteqlal Hospital in Kabul in 2016. WHO provided technical support and facilitated the implementation of risk factor surveys on NCDs in 5 urban settings and plans to carry out similar surveys in rural settings in 2017 to generate research to guide interventions for more effective control of cancer and other NCDs.

“The Government and partners need to urgently explore possibilities for including a number of high-impact interventions within Afghanistan's Basic Package of Health Services and Essential Package of Hospital Services and other possible service delivery mechanisms to reduce avoidable deaths,” said Dr Peeperkorn.

Related link

[Early cancer diagnosis saves lives, cuts treatment costs, 3 February 2017](#)

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