



21 May 2023, Beirut, Lebanon – The WHO Regional Office for the Eastern Mediterranean Region organized in Beirut 2 back-to-back regional consultative meetings. The first consultation was held on 15 and 16 May 2023 and focused on the development of guidelines on vitamin D. The second consultation was held on 17 and 18 May 2023 and focused on the prevention and management of anemia among women in the Eastern Mediterranean Region.

The first consultation included an expert discussion and presentations on the Lebanese vitamin D guidelines, their applicability to the countries of the Eastern Mediterranean Region, research gaps on vitamin D nutrition, as well as appropriate methodology for obtaining necessary data.

Dr Firas Abiad, Lebanon Minister of Public Health, praised the efforts of the “outstanding experts in Lebanon whose work serve as a model for excellence in research and education about the importance of vitamin D.” He emphasized “the important role played by partners such as WHO and the academic centers in advancing research in promoting this. Hosting this meeting in Lebanon confirms the vital role played by our academic centers in driving research and enhancing education in the Region as a whole.”

He explained that, “The Ministry of Public Health established a consultative committee to guide decisions related to bone and calcium diseases. The guidelines on vitamin D will enable primary health care centres, which are the cornerstone of the National Health Strategy that was launched in collaboration with WHO, to support in screening for vitamin D deficiency and providing needed supplements, further contributing to improved health outcomes.” He added “it is essential to have regional guidelines on vitamin D, especially in the context of limited

resources, to ensure that medical practice is based on the latest and most accurate information.”

He concluded by saying, "I look forward to the fruitful discussions and collaborations that will contribute to the development of comprehensive regional guidelines on vitamin D. Certainly, our efforts in this regard will have a positive impact on the health and well-being of individuals in the Eastern Mediterranean Region."

Dr Rana Hajjeh, Director of Programme Management at WHO Regional Office, highlighted the pioneering role of the WHO Collaborating Center for Metabolic Bone Disorders at the American University of Beirut, headed by Dr Ghada El-Hajj Fuleihan and noted that the, “Lebanese vitamin D guidelines are the fruit of an unprecedented national initiative that was possible through a remarkable collaborative effort.” She hopes that these guidelines can serve as a reference for other national guidelines in the Region.

“Despite the crises situation in the country, WHO in Lebanon is working with the Ministry of Public Health and key stakeholders on synergizing efforts to build back better,” mentioned by Dr Alissar Rady, Team Lead at WHO Lebanon. The National Nutrition Strategy for Lebanon serves as an overarching umbrella for partners to collaborate and respond to national priorities. She stressed on the importance of “strengthening collaboration with all entities to take a multi-faceted approach to address malnutrition and micronutrient deficiencies in the country.”

Dr Ghada El-Hajj Fuleihan noted what has been achieved for Lebanon in terms of guideline development, emphasizing the participatory approach with key stakeholders and saying that, “The guidelines will fill a major knowledge and care gap by providing recommendations that can help shape the vitamin D supplementation public health policy in Lebanon.”

The experts’ discussion on vitamin D guidelines was concluded by the way forward for adaptation of the Lebanese vitamin D guidelines to other countries of the Eastern Mediterranean Region. “We look forward to developing recommendations with the key experts to achieve progressive actions for national and regional guidelines.”, said Dr Ayoub Al Jawaldeh, WHO Regional Nutrition Adviser.

The experts’ discussion on anemia looked into the implementation of policies and interventions

including fortification and supplementation to address anemia and other micronutrient deficiencies of concern. It will provide an opportunity to identify opportunities and support needs for country collaboration to drive progress toward the global and regional anemia targets.

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