

9 October 2019, Cairo □ Health ministers and high-level representatives of the 22 countries of WHO's Eastern Mediterranean Region, partner organizations and civil society will take part in the Sixty-sixth Session of the WHO Regional Committee for the Eastern Mediterranean, in Tehran, Islamic Republic of Iran, from 14 to 17 October 2019.

The opening session, on Tuesday 15 October, will be attended by the President of Islamic Republic of Iran Dr Hassan Rouhani, WHO's Director-General Dr Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus, Minister of Health and Medical Education of Islamic Republic of Iran, and WHO's Regional Director for the Eastern Mediterranean Dr Ahmed Al-Mandhari.

Representatives will discuss a range of measures and strategies to improve key priority areas of public health, including preventing newborn, child and adolescent deaths, strengthening the Region's nursing workforce and hospital sector, developing capacity for evidence-informed policy-making in health, reducing the burden of noncommunicable diseases and strengthening the public health response to substance use.

WHO's Eastern Mediterranean Region has the second highest under-5 and adolescent mortality rates after the WHO African Region. In spite of a 51% reduction in under-5 mortality in the Region between 1990 and 2017, more than 800 000 children still died before their fifth birthday in 2017, mostly from preventable causes. Deaths among young adolescents are also largely preventable – the top five causes are collective violence and legal intervention, road injury, lower respiratory infections, and other types of injuries. Member States need to invest more in newborn and child health to achieve Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) 3.2: to end preventable deaths of newborns and children under 5 years of age by 2030, and to invest in and transform health systems to better respond to the health needs of adolescents to address the root causes of preventable mortality and morbidity among this age group and make progress towards universal health coverage (UHC).

Another essential factor in attaining the targets of the SDGs, in particular SDG 3.8: to achieve UHC, is the availability of an accessible health workforce with the correct skills mix and competencies to deliver required health services. Most countries in the Region face shortages in their overall health workforce, threatening progress towards UHC. With this in mind, the Regional Committee will discuss the role of nurses, who make up roughly half the total health workforce in the Region. On current trends, a regional shortfall of nurses is set to grow in the coming decade, and evidence also suggests that many countries could make better use of the nurses they have by broadening their role and improving professional education and training.

The Regional Committee will also discuss transforming the hospital sector in the Region, which accounts for a large share of government health spending in many countries. To achieve UHC, countries need a strong, comprehensive health system based on primary health care. Hospitals in both the public and private sectors need to be fully integrated into that system; all too often at present they are not. The Regional Committee will consider a proposed framework for action designed to help both health policy-makers and senior hospital managers ensure that all hospitals have a clear mission within the health system and fulfil it efficiently and effectively.

Another key issue for discussion is the development of national institutional capacity for evidence-informed policy-making. Effective health policies must be based on relevant, accurate and up-to-date evidence, including both targeted research and effective use of routine data. However, many countries lack the capacity to generate the evidence they need and to use it systematically to inform policy choices. The Regional Committee will discuss ways to improve the situation, including a proposed framework to guide capacity-building efforts in countries with a wide range of needs, from those with limited resources and those facing protracted emergencies to wealthier countries looking to make the most of their capacities.

Noncommunicable diseases (NCDs) continue to represent a global threat to health and development, and in spite of improvements over the last 6 years, countries in the Region are not on track to achieve SDG 3.4: to reduce by one third the number of premature deaths from NCDs by 2030. In 2016, NCDs were responsible for 2.6 million deaths in the Region, and this figure is expected to increase to more than 3.8 million by 2030. The Regional Committee will discuss ways to step up action to tackle NCDs, including a proposed update to the regional framework for action on NCDs which adds air pollution to the major risk factors that need to be addressed and also requires a stronger focus on mental health.

Globally, about 500 000 people die each year as a result of substance use disorders. Many of these people never receive treatment in spite of evidence that demonstrates treatment reduces substance use, crime and mortality and morbidity rates from conditions related to substance use such as HIV and hepatitis C. In the Region, as few as one in 13 people receive treatment. To achieve the SDGs, and specifically the goal of UHC, countries need to increase treatment coverage for substance use disorders and develop comprehensive, integrated health and social services for substance use and substance use disorders.

During the opening session, Dr Ahmed Al-Mandhari will present a report covering the work of the Regional Office in 2018 and early 2019. He will also discuss Vision 2023, WHO's new vision

for public health in the Eastern Mediterranean Region. Vision 2023 commits WHO to strive for “Health for All by All” in the Region and identifies four strategic priorities: expanding universal health coverage, addressing health emergencies, promoting healthier populations and transforming WHO itself.

The Regional Committee will also discuss progress in polio eradication, environmental health, civil registration and vital statistics systems, immunization goals, mental health care, cancer prevention and control, and tackling antimicrobial resistance.

Saturday 17th of May 2025 11:38:55 AM