



28 August 2018, Cairo, Egypt – A ministerial meeting on the road to universal health coverage (UHC) in the Eastern Mediterranean Region will be held in Salalah, Oman, from 3 to 5 September 2018. Hosted by the Government of Oman and organized by the WHO Regional Office for the Eastern Mediterranean, the 3-day meeting will bring together ministers of health, high-level officials from ministries of health and finance, global and regional experts, parliamentarians and development partners.

The meeting is part of WHO’s efforts to maintain a strong focus on UHC by holding a series of events throughout 2018. The meeting will share with policy-makers global best practices in effectively advancing towards UHC through health system strengthening in line with the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development.

UHC is a key strategy to make progress towards other health-related and broader development goals. It is now a top strategic and leadership priority for WHO and an overarching priority of WHO’s work in the Region to respond to the lack of access to needed quality health care and the devastating impact of the growing financial burden of out-of-pocket expenditure on health, which impacts low-income groups in particular. About 100 million people are impoverished globally every year due to out-of-pocket expenditure on health care, 7.7 million of whom live in the Region.

UHC means that all people and communities can access the promotive, preventive, curative, rehabilitative and palliative health services they need, of sufficient quality to be effective, while also ensuring that the use of these services does not expose them to financial hardship.

Access to essential quality care and financial protection not only enhances people’s health and life expectancy, it also protects countries from epidemics, reduces poverty and the risk of hunger, creates jobs, drives economic growth and enhances gender equality.

“Many countries in the Region subscribe to the vision of UHC but providing access to health services is still a major challenge in the face of many ongoing acute and protracted emergencies,” said Dr Ahmed Al-Mandhari, WHO Regional Director for the Eastern Mediterranean.

The journey towards UHC requires strengthening of health systems, including increasing public investment in health and effectively addressing social and environmental determinants of health through intersectoral action. Social health protection and equity are key considerations in achieving UHC.

“We are convening this ministerial meeting to recommit ourselves to the UHC goal, and to support Member States to develop and implement national roadmaps to strengthen their health systems to make progress towards UHC,” Dr Al-Mandhari added.

In line with the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, countries have pledged their commitment to achieve UHC by 2030. Now is the time to transform this global commitment into national action. “Business as usual will not work. We need a three-pronged paradigm shift: UHC is possible; resources can be mobilized; and health should be considered in all policies. WHO is calling for a shift in mindset,” said Dr Zafar Mirza, Director of Health System Development in the WHO Regional Office. “UHC is indeed first and foremost a political choice. Once that choice is made, everything falls in place.”

The meeting is expected to conclude with the signing of the UHC2030 global compact by all Member States to reinforce their commitment to develop a vision and implement national roadmaps to make progress towards UHC in the Region.

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Thursday 13th of December 2018 03:26:31 AM