

The Sixty-fourth Session of the World Health Organization (WHO) Regional Committee for the Eastern Mediterranean opened on Monday evening, 9 October 2017, in Islamabad, Pakistan. As WHO's governing body at the regional level, the Regional Committee comprises representatives of all 22 countries in WHO's Eastern Mediterranean Region.

In the presence of His Excellency Mr Mamnoon Hussain, President of Pakistan, the opening session was inaugurated by Dr Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus, WHO's Director-General, Dr Mahmoud Fikri, WHO's Regional Director for the Eastern Mediterranean, and H.E. Dr Feroz Ferozuddin, Minister of Public Health of Afghanistan and Vice-Chair of the Sixty-third Regional Committee.

Ministers of health and their representatives will discuss important public health priorities for countries of the Region, and more than 250 public health leaders and experts will attend the meeting, including representatives of national, regional and international organizations, and the WHO Secretariat comprising staff from headquarters and the Regional Office for the Eastern Mediterranean.

The Regional Director will present his annual report to the Regional Committee on the work undertaken by WHO in the Eastern Mediterranean Region in 2016. It focuses on important milestones achieved in response to the 5 strategic priorities endorsed by countries of the Region in 2012.

This is the first Regional Committee meeting since Dr Mahmoud Fikri was elected WHO Regional Director for the Eastern Mediterranean. His vision for WHO's work in the Region has been set out in a roadmap which presents a set of strategic actions to guide WHO's work with Member States for the next five years. Focus is placed on 5 priority areas of public health – emergencies and health security, communicable diseases, noncommunicable diseases, maternal, neonatal, child and adolescent health, and health system strengthening – which align with the targets of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and will ensure country progress in moving towards universal health coverage.

The Regional Committee will be invited to endorse a proposed regional framework for action on cancer prevention and control. Cancer is the second leading cause of death worldwide, representing nearly one in 6 deaths globally. In WHO's Eastern Mediterranean Region, most

cases of cancer are diagnosed at a late stage when treatments are less effective which results in poorer outcomes for patients. The proposed framework will assist countries to decide which priority interventions to implement for cancer prevention and control according to their national context.

The Regional Committee will also be invited to endorse a proposed updated framework for action on climate change and health. Climate change is among the biggest global health threats of the 21st century. Rising global temperatures are affecting the intensity and frequency of heat waves and the incidence of extreme weather conditions such as flooding and droughts. Climate change poses serious, yet preventable, effects on human health and intensifies morbidity and mortality, especially among vulnerable populations. WHO considers that climate change represents a fundamental threat to lives and well-being and has called for urgent global action to protect health from climate-related risks.

The SDGs, which seek to achieve sustainable global economic, social and environmental development by 2030, will not be realized without investment in adolescent health and well-being. Many adolescent diseases and injuries are preventable or treatable, but are often neglected. The adolescent mortality rate in low-income and middle-income countries in the Eastern Mediterranean Region is the second highest in the world. The "Global Accelerated Action for Health of Adolescent (AA-HA!): guidance to support country implementation" is intended as a tool for national policy-makers and programme managers to assist them in planning, implementing, monitoring and evaluating adolescent health programmes. Member States will focus on this area during the Sixty-fourth Regional Committee as they are urged to translate the commitments made in the Global Strategy for Women's, Children's and Adolescent Health 2016–2030 into action by developing and implementing national strategic plans for adolescent health.

Also on the agenda is antimicrobial resistance, which has emerged as a major public health problem that threatens the advances of modern medicine. While countries of the Region recognize antimicrobial resistance as an important public health problem and are committed to addressing the problem, they face a range of challenges, including a lack of data on the extent of the problem.

During the Regional Committee meeting, WHO will report 2016 progress to Member States in the areas of: polio eradication; improving health and the environment; addressing the adverse health effects of air pollution; implementation of the Eastern Mediterranean vaccine action plan 2016–2020; civil registration and vital statistics systems; prevention and control of noncommunicable diseases; mental health care; implementation of the International Health

Regulations (IHR 2005); and implementation of the regional malaria action plan.

On the final day of the meeting, representatives of Member States will consider endorsement of resolutions and decisions for implementation of programmatic activities in their countries to advance the regional public health agenda and improve the health of their populations.

Related links

[Sixty-fourth Session of the WHO Regional Committee for the Eastern Mediterranean website](#)

[Roadmap of WHO's work for the Eastern Mediterranean Region 2017–2021](#)

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