



Unite for Universal Health Coverage: Now is the Time for Collective Action

12 December 2018, Cairo □ Universal Health Coverage (UHC) Day, commemorated each 12 December, is the anniversary of the first unanimous United Nations resolution calling for countries to provide affordable, quality health care to every person, everywhere.

“UHC is a simple idea: that everyone should be able to access the health services they need, without suffering financial hardship. Globally, we have a lot of work to do to realise that dream,” said Dr Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus, Director-General of the World Health Organization (WHO).

“At least half of the world's population cannot access essential services like vaccination, essential medicines, or the ability to see a health worker. And every year, nearly 100 million people are pushed into extreme poverty due to out-of-pocket health spending.”

In the WHO Eastern Mediterranean Region, around 40% of health expenditure comes directly from people's pockets, and most people cannot afford it. People with low incomes and without social protection are the hardest hit. As a result, an estimated 7.5 million people are pushed into poverty every year in the Region due to spending on health.

UHC has a special relevance to people living in countries with acute and prolonged emergency situations, and therefore for the Region, given that half of the world's internally displaced populations are living in countries of the Region and more than 60% of the world's refugees and migrants originate from the Region.

Vision 2023, developed by Dr Ahmed Al-Mandhari, WHO Regional Director for the Eastern Mediterranean, to guide the Organization's work, acknowledges the socioeconomic diversity,

opportunities and challenges facing the Region and calls for solidarity and action to promote “Health for All by All”. In line with WHO’s Thirteenth General Programme of Work 2019–2023, Vision 2023 has identified expanding UHC as a top strategic priority for the Region, and focuses on implementing the recommendations of the Salalah Declaration on UHC of September 2018 to ensure that at least 100 million more people benefit from UHC by 2023.

“Vision 2023 is a renewed call to aspire to the goal of Health for All, but it also stresses that Health for All can only be achieved by All. To move towards UHC, we need to engage everyone – governments, parliaments, academic and professional institutions, nongovernmental organizations, our sister United Nations agencies, communities, civil society and individuals – as proactive agents for change,” said Dr Al-Mandhari.

“I am glad that the theme for UHC Day 2018 is in harmony with our vision of Health for All by All. We shall all unite for UHC. Now is the time for collective action.”

Ministers of health and heads of delegations from the countries of the Region have recently collectively signed the UHC2030 Global Compact, making the Region the first among WHO’s six regions to do so. The signing of the UHC2030 Global Compact demonstrates a high level of commitment to take action and make progress towards UHC by the countries of the Region. Furthermore, WHO’s Regional Committee for the Eastern Mediterranean in its 65th Session this year endorsed a resolution urging Member States to formulate a national vision for UHC and a roadmap towards its realization, taking into account country-specific health system challenges, the economic situation and people’s preferences.

The essence of UHC is the provision of an essential package of health services to the whole population and ensuring that those who cannot pay for health care are financially protected through prepayment schemes. Every country can make progress towards UHC, even low-income countries and those affected by emergencies.

“Providing a basic package of health services for all, and then employing progressive universalism by building on this package as more resources become available, is the way to go about it”, said Dr Zafar Mirza, Director, Health System Development at the WHO Regional Office for the Eastern Mediterranean.

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