12 December 2019 - On Universal Health Coverage (UHC) Day, WHO has called on leaders in the Eastern Mediterranean Region to make sure that everyone has access to the health services they need despite the many challenges facing the Region.

According to recent research, essential health services are less widely accessible in the Eastern Mediterranean Region than in many parts of the world. Between 2000 and 2017, the UHC service coverage index (SCI), which measures the availability of essential services, increased globally from 45 to 66 out of 100. But the Eastern Mediterranean Region scored less than 60, well below most world regions.

A major issue is low public investment in health, which means that many people in the Region struggle to pay for treatment when they or their loved ones need it. Out-of-pocket payment accounts for around 40% of all spending on health, and the number of people facing financial hardship due to health-care costs has been rising. In 2000, 8% of the Region’s population faced catastrophic health expenditure, and by 2015 the figure had reached 11.7%.

The Region’s decision-makers have committed to transforming the situation. At a landmark event in September 2018, ministers of health and heads of delegations from the countries of the Region came together to sign the UHC2030 Global Compact, pledging to work together to accelerate progress in advancing towards UHC. The Eastern Mediterranean Region was the first of WHO’s six regions to collectively approve the Global Compact, and its countries have reaffirmed their commitment to UHC several times since then, notably through resolutions of the WHO Regional Committee for the Eastern Mediterranean, the Organization’s main governing body in the Region.

Most recently, the 66th session of the Regional Committee, held in Tehran, Islamic Republic of
Iran, in October 2019, endorsed resolutions on a range of critical health issues, including strengthening the nursing and midwifery workforce, ending preventable newborn, child and adolescent deaths and improving health and development, transforming the hospital sector, improving evidence-informed policy-making for health, and tackling noncommunicable diseases and substance use.

There has also been significant global momentum to advance towards UHC. The first United Nations High-level Meeting on Universal Health Coverage in September 2019 concluded with the adoption of a Political Declaration on UHC encouraging all countries to accelerate progress.

Now, leaders are being encouraged to make good on their commitments. Universal Health Coverage (UHC) Day is an opportunity to reiterate the importance of UHC, grounded in the belief that health is and always will be a right for all. This year’s UHC Day focuses on the theme “Keep the Promise”.

“We know what needs to be done and we have a roadmap to achieve it. I call on all leaders of our Region to fulfill their commitments. UHC is a promise that we must act on to realize our vision of Health for All by All” said Dr Ahmed Al Mandhari, WHO Regional Director for the Eastern Mediterranean, on the UHC Day 2019.

“Now is the time to see action plans guaranteeing health as a right, not a privilege; to see real investment in a society where all people – regardless of gender, race, religion, citizenship, age, ability, sexual orientation, or wealth – can get the quality health care they need and trust; to see strong, equitable health systems that truly leave no one behind.”
WHO Regional Director's message on UHC Day 2019

Campaign material:

https://universalhealthcoverageday.org

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