

30 November 2015 – The World Health Organization (WHO) calls upon decision-makers in health to “put commitment into action” in bringing treatment to all people living with HIV. HIV treatment with antiretroviral medicines is life-saving. Early start of treatment improves the quality of life and longevity of people living with HIV. In addition, treating all patients reduces the transmission.

In the Eastern Mediterranean Region, overall prevalence of HIV has remained low at 0.1%. However, the epidemic is still growing. With more people becoming infected, more people need treatment. Most countries in the Region continue to increase access to life-saving antiretroviral therapy and coverage has increased from close to 11 000 in 2009 to 38 000 in 2014. However, “While the number of people who are receiving treatment has been steadily increasing, treatment coverage in our Region is still the lowest in the world. To this day, less than 1 in 5 people living with HIV are receiving treatment,” said Dr Ala Alwan, WHO Regional Director for the Eastern Mediterranean.

HIV testing is the first step in accessing HIV care and treatment. In the Region, the majority of people living with HIV do not know their HIV status. In addition to the limited availability of HIV testing services, stigma and discrimination against people living with HIV in health care settings is a major concern in the Region. It still prevents people at risk from taking a test and seeking care and thus perpetuates the HIV epidemic. “It is the responsibility of leaders in the health sector to exert their utmost effort to eliminate stigma and discrimination in health care settings and to protect people affected by HIV from their consequences,” stressed Dr Alwan.

Achieving treatment for all people living with HIV requires robust and concerted efforts from governments, civil society, academia and the private sector to ensure that people living with HIV are engaged in a continuum of health services. This means that people at risk of HIV must have easy access to testing, and people who are diagnosed with HIV are linked to treatment services and supported to remain in lifelong care and treatment. WHO continues to recommend getting the treatment closer to people living with HIV; and shifting to lay services and community providers to improve access and retention in care.

Globally, the world is looking at ending the AIDS epidemic by 2030 as part of the new Sustainable Development Goals. Now it’s time to act even more boldly, to take innovative steps so the world can meet this target.

“The new targets are bold and ambitious. But, with strong political commitment and concrete action, we know that these targets can be achieved,” concluded Dr Alwan.

Related links

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[New recommendations show how to treat all people living with HIV and decrease new infections](#)

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