

1 December 2016, Cairo – “Dignity above all” is the regional slogan of this year’s World AIDS Day, celebrated every year on 1 December. This year’s campaign in the Eastern Mediterranean Region calls on all stakeholders to work together to end stigma and discrimination against people living with HIV in health care settings.

The campaign is soliciting high-level political commitment and advocating active measures to end stigma and discrimination against people living with HIV in health care settings in which it is their right to receive adequate care and quality treatment.

In his message on the occasion of World AIDS Day, Dr Ala Alwan, WHO Regional Director for the Eastern Mediterranean, says “It is unacceptable that, over 35 years into the epidemic, stigma and discrimination against people living with HIV is still widespread among health care workers of all disciplines. Stigma and discrimination in health care settings seriously constrain our ability to end the HIV epidemic.” He added, “Contrary to medical ethics, people living with HIV often endure rejection and denial of health care for general conditions that are related or unrelated to their HIV infection. Such negative experiences deter those in need from seeking care and eventually their health deteriorates.”

Globally, already 15 million people are accessing life-saving HIV treatment. New HIV infections have been reduced by 35% since 2000 and AIDS-related deaths have been reduced by 42% since the peak in 2004. However, in the Region, at the end of 2015, less than 20% of people living with HIV in the Region knew their HIV status and only 14% of them were receiving treatment.

While the world embarks on the “Fast-Track to End AIDS” strategy, ending the AIDS epidemic by 2030 as part of the Sustainable Development Goals will require greater investment, commitment and innovation.

The lack of policies and regulations to protect the rights of people living with HIV and to provide guidance and best practices in health care facilities worsen the situation. A generic policy for protecting people living with HIV in the Region from stigma and discrimination has been developed as a model by the WHO Regional Office. The policy identifies the forms of discrimination faced by people in health care settings. They include denial of access to services, counselling and testing, exclusion and isolation in specific wards and rooms, disclosure of HIV

status without a patient’s consent, verbal abuse and lack of respect and extra unjustified infection control; measures that can mark a person as HIV-positive.

The policy also identifies reasons behind stigma and discrimination in health care settings among which are the lack of knowledge about modes of HIV transmission, fears around the incurability of the disease and judgmental attitudes towards behavioural practices of people living with HIV.

It clearly articulates the right of people living with HIV to health care and the ethical duties of health care providers both within and outside health care settings to provide adequate and equal care.

The generic policy inspired country actions. Through close work with national AIDS programmes in Member States, 14 countries will denounce stigma and discrimination against people living with HIV in health care settings and will announce national policies to protect them against those breaches of medical ethics.

On the occasion of World AIDS Day, the WHO Regional Office is calling upon governments, civil society and patient groups to engage actively in ending HIV stigma and discrimination in health care settings and to put dignity above all.

Related link

[World AIDS Day 2016](#)

For more information:

Dr Hamida Khattabi
Medical Officer
khattabih@who.int
Office: (02) 2276 5549
Mobile: 010 0341 3911

Ms Joumana Hermez
Technical Officer
hermezj@who.int
Office: (02) 2276 5292
Mobile 012 2783 9423

Ms Mona Yassin
Communications Officer
yassinm@who.int
Office: (02) 2276 5292
Mobile: +201006019284

Sunday 18th of May 2025 12:14:57 AM