



HEALTH FOR ALL

March 2018 – This year, the theme of World Health Day is ‘Universal health coverage: everyone, everywhere’ under the slogan ‘Health for All’.

Access to universal health coverage can prevent people from being pushed into poverty because they are forced to pay for the costs of their health care. Without universal coverage, the lives and welfare of millions of people and communities around the world are negatively affected, particularly in low-income countries. Universal health coverage increases people’s opportunity to work and earn a living, increases children’s chances of reaching their full academic potential and forms the basis for long term economic development.

WHO is founded on the principle that it is the right of everyone to enjoy the highest attainable standard of health. However, almost 100 million people are being pushed into extreme poverty, forced to survive on just US\$ 1.90 or less a day, because they have to pay for health services out of their own pockets.

In the Eastern Mediterranean Region, 40% of health expenditure comes directly from people’s pockets; people on low incomes and without social protection are the hardest hit. As many as 55.5 million people across the Region face financial hardship as a result of out-of-pocket health expenditure; and as many as 7.7 million are pushed into poverty due to these costs. In some countries of the Region, out-of-pocket payments for health services account for over 70% of total national spending on health.

“Universal health coverage is a fundamental human right,” stated Dr Jaouad Mahjour, acting WHO Regional Director for the Eastern Mediterranean. “Ensuring the right to health for all people and universal health coverage are two sides of the same coin and have been the driving force behind WHO’s work since its foundation. World Health Day this year coincides with two special events – the seventieth anniversary of the establishment of WHO and the fortieth anniversary of the Alma Ata Declaration on Primary Health Care”.

World Health Day 2018 serves as a reminder to countries of the commitments they made when they adopted the Sustainable Development Goals and committed to taking concrete steps to advance the Health for All agenda.

Universal health coverage means that all individuals and communities receive the health care services they need without suffering financial hardship. Universal health coverage enables everyone to access the services that address the most important causes of disease and death, and ensures that those services are of sufficient quality to improve the health of the people who receive them.

“Universal health coverage is also about ensuring access to essential quality care and financial protection,” Dr Mahjour added. This not only enhances people’s health and their life expectancy, it also protects countries from epidemics, reduces poverty and the risk of hunger, creates jobs, drives economic growth and enhances gender equality.

On the occasion of World Health Day 2018, and as part of regional celebrations, the WHO Regional Office for the Eastern Mediterranean will host a panel discussion on universal health coverage, focusing on vulnerable and refugee populations on 4 April 2018. The panel will consist of senior global and regional public health experts and leaders. They will share global and regional success stories highlighting financial protection, population coverage and service coverage. The panel will also emphasize the need for private and civil society partnerships.

“Universal health coverage has a special relevance to people living in countries with acute and prolonged emergency situations. This is unfortunately the case in our Region, noting that half of the world’s internally displaced populations (IDPs) are living in some countries of the Region and more than 60% of the world’s refugees and migrants originate from the Region. As such, we are placing a special focus on universal health coverage for refugees and migrants,” said Dr Zafar Mirza, Director of Health Systems in the WHO Regional Office for the Eastern Mediterranean.

World Health Day represents an opportunity to shed light on the need for universal health coverage and the positive outcomes for health. On this occasion, WHO reiterates its commitment to promoting health for all, without discrimination, to ensure that no one, anywhere, is left behind.

Related links

[World Health Day 2018 – Universal health coverage: everyone, everywhere](#)

[Follow the live stream on 4 April of a media panel discussion on #HealthForAll at 11:00 am](#)

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