



## Health Day 2019 الصحة العالمي

7 April 2019, Cairo – The World Health Organization (WHO) Regional Office for the Eastern Mediterranean joins the world today in marking World Health Day 2019 focusing on primary health care as the path towards universal health coverage.

World Health Day 2019 places a special emphasis on equity and solidarity – on raising the bar for health for everyone, everywhere by addressing gaps in services and ensuring that no one is left behind. These key principles are in line with the new Vision 2033 for public health in the Region, which calls for solidarity and action to achieve Health for All by All.

One of the major targets set by world leaders in the United Nations' Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) is achieving universal health coverage. Primary health care is an essential foundation for universal health coverage. On this year's World Health Day, WHO urges decision-makers to make sure that health is considered in all government policies and that more resources are invested in primary health care in order to make universal health coverage a reality.

To mark World Health Day, the WHO Regional Office organized a ceremony on the morning of Friday 5 April 2019 on the bank of the river Nile in Cairo, Egypt. The event brought together a large number of local, regional and international partners and stakeholders, as well as members of civil society, youth and the media. All participants took part in a Move for Health physical activity session and then formed a large human solidarity chain, while chanting Health for All by All.

Hosted by Dr Ahmed Al-Mandhari, WHO Regional Director for the Eastern Mediterranean, the celebration was attended by a representative of HE Dr Hala Zaid, Egyptian Minister of Health and Population, Mr Geert Cappelaere, United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) Regional Director for the Middle East and North Africa, Mr Ethan Wong, representative of the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation, and Mr Richard Dictus, United Nations Resident Coordinator and United Nations Development Programme Resident Representative in Egypt.

In her message to the celebration, Dr Zaid commended the collaboration between WHO and the Ministry of Health and Population of Egypt that has resulted in the successful launch and implementation of the 100 Million Healthier Lives campaign to test Egyptians for hepatitis C virus (HCV) and noncommunicable diseases. At the conclusion of its third phase, the campaign has fulfilled its objective of testing 50 million people nationwide. The message highlighted the new comprehensive health insurance system in Egypt, a critical step that the Government has taken towards provision of universal health coverage to all people across the country.

In his remarks, Dr Ahmed Al-Mandhari, reiterated that WHO and UNICEF have had a longstanding and deep rooted partnership for primary health care since the historical Alma Ata declaration on "health for all" in 1978, which was renewed in Astana, Kazakhstan, in late 2018. He noted that between 80% and 90% of essential health services can be delivered at the primary health care level – including in emergencies, which have unfortunately become a defining feature of the Region.

"In my recent visit to Yemen, I met dozens of patients in hospitals who would have died without the essential medicines, treatments and care that are part of primary health care services. I was able to meet Khadeeja, a 2-year-old girl who was saved from severe acute malnutrition at a WHO-supported health facility because that health facility existed and was equipped with the staff and supplies needed to save her life. This is why primary health care and universal health coverage are important – because they ensure that even the most vulnerable have access to essential, life-saving health services at the primary health care level so that no one needs to die of a medically treatable condition", he said.

In his speech, UNICEF Regional Director Mr Geert Cappelaere also commended the partnership and joint collaboration between the two organizations, helping to make the historical promise of health for all a reality.

“Primary health care has the ability to reach communities, including the most vulnerable. It is instrumental in ensuring the right to health for all. It is a vital platform to invest in; we have done and we must continue to do so”, he said. “It is through primary health care that most safe births happen, children are immunized against preventable diseases, and their nutrition status checked. It is increasingly where the first line of psychosocial support can be given, where child victims of violence can be identified and then better protected, where families can be provided with the best advice to take care of their children, including by adopting safe hygiene practices, and where delays in development can be early diagnosed for timely interventions and treatment.”

During the event, the Primary Health Care Performance Initiative (PHCPI) of the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation was launched to support measurement and improvement of primary health care in the Region. PHCPI is a partnership dedicated to transforming the global state of primary health care. It works closely with governments and development partners who are looking to strengthen primary health care, providing them with the data, information and support they need to drive evidence-based improvements. The Initiative aims to identify the progress that countries have made towards improving primary health care.

“The Gates Foundation is excited to support the WHO and UNICEF as it launches a region-wide initiative to assess country-level primary health care performance in partnership with PHCPI. This Region will be at the forefront of a global movement to improve primary health care, and this primary health care assessment initiative will be the biggest of its kind to date. We are excited to join you for this journey, and to take the lessons learned along the way to share with the global community”, said Mr Ethan Wong from the Bill & Melinda Gates foundation.

Addressing the event, the United Nations Resident Coordinator, Mr Richard Dictus, noted that although health is the main focus of SDG 3, it is interlinked with many of the other Goals, such as those on education, social protection, and the environment, among others. Referring to the launch of PHCPI at the event, he highlighted the importance of partnership among United Nations agencies for achieving the goal of health for all by all. He cited the example of healthy nutrition initiatives, to which agencies such as the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO) and World Food Programme (WFP) could contribute.

“On World Health Day, I call upon governments, partners, civil society, individuals, and all of us here to come together and work together to ensure the attainment of health by everyone in the Region and beyond”, concluded Dr Al-Mandhari.

[Information about the World Health Day 2019 campaign](#)

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Sunday 27th of April 2025 07:49:53 AM