



World Cancer Day campaign material by Union for International Cancer Control 1 February 2016 – On World Cancer Day, 4 February, the World Health Organization is calling on communities and individuals alike to take action to prevent and control cancer, one of the world’s biggest killers. More than 30% of cancers can be prevented through the adoption of healthy lifestyles. Raising people’s awareness of the links between lifestyle and cancer can not only reduce the burden of cancer but empower people to make healthy lifestyle choices, such as quitting smoking, keeping physically active and choosing healthy food and drinks.

Cancer is one of the main noncommunicable or chronic diseases, which kill more than 2.2 million people every year in the WHO Eastern Mediterranean Region. Cancer alone is responsible for nearly 400 000 of these deaths. “Regrettably,” says Dr Ala Alwan, WHO Regional Director for the Eastern Mediterranean, “evidence shows that cancer rates continue to rise globally and regionally because of limited access to treatment and quality cancer care, as well as unhealthy lifestyles”.

Cancer ranks among the top four leading causes of death in the Region. In the next 20 years, cancer rates are expected to almost double, from an estimated 555 318 new cases in 2012 to nearly 961 098 in 2030 – the highest relative increase among all WHO regions. “This shows a clear need to take action to reverse this trend,” says Dr Alwan. Cancer prevention and control is possible but requires action on all fronts. There are serious gaps in access to treatment and quality cancer care. “Health systems need to address cancer management through

strengthening health systems and moving towards universal health coverage,” explains Dr Alwan. He adds, “There is also much work to be done on prevention in terms of both public education and policy action”.

The regional framework for action, a road map for countries of the Region to implement the United Nations Political Declaration on Prevention and Control of Noncommunicable Diseases, is central to accelerating action on cancer prevention and control. It sets out some of the strategic milestones that countries need to reach if they are to achieve the nine voluntary targets to reduce the number of premature deaths from NCDs by 25% by 2025. The targets address risk behaviours, such as tobacco use, harmful use of alcohol, unhealthy diet and physical inactivity.

This World Cancer Day:

- Governments can provide and improve access to quality cancer care, as well as develop and effect policies that promote and normalize healthy eating and living, in addition to banning marketing of tobacco products and unhealthy foods and beverages high in fat, sugar and salt.
- Civil society groups, including nongovernmental organizations and the media, can work with individuals and communities to educate and diffuse key messages on signs and symptoms, the importance of early detection, as well as the impact of adopting healthy behaviours.
- Individuals and families can adopt healthier behaviours, share experiences, as well as ask for support and support others.

On World Cancer Day and beyond, everyone can inspire, take action and make change. Everyone can play a role in reducing the burden of cancer.

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