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Cancer is the fourth leading cause of death in the WHO Eastern Mediterranean Region and its incidence is increasing rapidly. It is estimated that cancer currently kills 272 000 people each year in the Region- more than HIV, tuberculosis and malaria combined. At present, resources for cancer control in the Region as a whole are not only inadequate but directed almost exclusively to treatment. This approach is suboptimal because full advantage is not taken of the impact of preventive measures on incidence, while the lack of approaches to achieve earlier diagnosis reduces the value of therapy.

Working closely with Member States, WHO developed a regional strategy on cancer prevention and control, which aims at minimizing the growing impact of cancer in the Region over the following years (2009-2013). The regional strategy was endorsed by the ministers of health at the 56th session of the WHO Regional Committee for the Eastern Mediterranean in October 2009. The strategy provides a foundation for the development of a comprehensive coordinated national approach to cancer control that is resource-oriented. A framework for country action was developed also, to support countries in adapting the regional strategy according to their cancer national priorities and available resources.

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