

Riyadh, 9-12 September 2012 - Under the auspices of the Custodian of the two Holy Mosques, King Abdullah bin Abdulaziz Al Saud, the Ministry of Health of Saudi Arabia, in collaboration with the WHO Regional Office for the Eastern Mediterranean, is organizing an International Conference on Healthy Lifestyles and Non-communicable Diseases (NCDs) in the Arab World and the Middle East.

The conference will be held in King Fahd Cultural Centre in Riyadh from 9 to 12 September 2012. The conference aims to create momentum for the implementation of the United Nations General Assembly Political Declaration on Prevention and Control of Non-communicable Diseases at the regional level. It is expected that a "Riyadh Declaration" will be adopted at the end of the Conference, to reiterate participants' commitment, and that of the parties they represent, to making the United Nations General Assembly Political Declaration on Control and Prevention of Non-communicable Diseases a success story across the Region.

Several concerned Saudi ministers for non-health sectors will participate in the conference to illustrate the multisectoral approach necessary in preventing and controlling NCD. In addition, several ministers of health from other countries in the region will personally attend the conference.

Participants in the conference are experts on NCD from ministries and governmental agencies, as well as representatives from United Nations funds, programmes and agencies, the International Federation for Football (FIFA) and other key international and regional organizations and stakeholders from civil society.

"The call to hold this conference goes in line with the health, social and economic developments that the Eastern Mediterranean Region has witnessed over the past decades", said Dr Ala Alwan, WHO Regional Director for the Eastern Mediterranean. By hosting this important conference and providing full sponsorship to make it happen, Saudi Arabia adds significantly to its contribution to health improvement in the Region", Dr Alwan added.

Tracing the developments of life expectancy in the region over the past decades can help understand the growing trends in NCD incidence and mortality which have been experienced in the past decades in the Region. Life expectancy in the WHO Eastern Mediterranean Region has increased from 51 years in 1970 to almost 70 today, the greatest gain of any region in the

world. It is estimated that more than 2.2 million people died from NCDs in the Region in 2008 – mainly from cardiovascular diseases, cancers, chronic respiratory diseases and diabetes. This figure accounts, on average, for 53% of all deaths, but in some countries may reach more than 80%.

More than 95% of these deaths occur in low- and middle-income countries of the Region, where 1 out of 3 people die before the age of 60. Regrettably, most of those deaths are preventable.

“Notwithstanding its ample resources, the Arab world, and the larger Middle East will witness 2.6 million deaths in 2015 and 3.8 million in 2030, if no serious action is taken to scale up efforts to reduce the incidence and to improve the quality of care of NCDs” Dr Alwan noted.

There are regional specificities contributing to the magnitude of the NCD problem in the Arab world and the Middle East.

“Already,” says the Regional Director, “six out of ten countries with the highest prevalence of diabetes in the world are located in the Region. Some risk factors for diabetes and cardiovascular diseases have socio-cultural and behavioural dimensions increasingly more prevalent in this part of the world”.

Soaring obesity rates can generally be attributed to over-consumption of high-caloric foods combined with little physical activity, leading to higher rates especially among Arab women” Dr Alwan added.

Overweight and obesity rates for adults in the Region are estimated at 30.4% and 12%, respectively, reaching as high as 66% and 31.5% in countries of the Gulf Cooperation Council.

“The International Conference is a unique opportunity for governments and concerned nongovernmental stakeholders in the Region to re-assess their commitment to a number of goals” said Dr Ziad Memish, Undersecretary for Public Health at the Saudi Ministry of Health. He specified the following issues as priorities on the conference agenda:

Exerting strong, sustained political leadership to set national targets and indicators for the prevention and control of NCDs;

Scaling up essential access to NCD treatment and care in all countries;

Involving all sectors, including civil society and the private sector, in prevention and control activities;

Positioning NCDs as central to national development and NCD control at the heart of efforts to promote socioeconomic growth.

“In this context, participants will discuss NCD incidence and premature mortality and their impact on social and economic outputs, mechanisms to control NCDs and cost-effective interventions aiming at strengthening country-level surveillance and monitoring systems and improving the quality of health care services” Dr Memish pointed out.

The conference will focus on a core set of evidence-based ‘best-buy’ interventions that are feasible, low-cost and appropriate within the constraints of the local health system and socio-cultural specificity. Policy-makers are invited to consider implementing such interventions for the entire population, and to assess progress made. In various panels and sessions, presenters will share their particular experiences in improving NCD control efforts. Failed interventions areas will be discussed along with success stories as lessons learnt.

H.E Dr Abdullah bin Abdulaziz Al-Rabeeah, Minister of Health of Saudi Arabia, and Dr Ala Alwan will chair sessions where international experts will present the experience of NCD control in the industrialized countries. The conference will also review an original project: “Football for Health” implemented by the International Federation for Football (FIFA) from 2008–2012.

Saturday 17th of May 2025 01:35:17 PM