

Muscat, 28 October 2013 – The World Health Organization (WHO) and the Joint United Nations Programme on HIV/AIDS (UNAIDS) are jointly campaigning for a new initiative to accelerate HIV testing and treatment coverage in a region where only 15% of the estimated people in need of treatment are receiving it, making it the region with the lowest HIV treatment coverage in the world. An advocacy document entitled, “Accelerating HIV treatment in the WHO Eastern Mediterranean and UNAIDS Middle East and North Africa regions”, was launched today at the 60th session of the WHO Regional Committee for the Eastern Mediterranean in Muscat, Oman.

The document analyses the regional context and offers a tailored regional framework for a significant scale-up in treatment coverage. It is built on four pillars: creating demand for testing and treatment; investing in sustainable systems for HIV care; delivering results in an equitable manner; and committing to urgent action.

“The treatment crisis in the region is reversible,” said Dr Yamina Chakkar, Director UNAIDS-Regional Support Team for the Middle East and North Africa. “We are eager to join forces with our partners and with regional leaders to renew the commitment and bring HIV testing and treatment services to the people who need them.”

The region is one of two in the world where new HIV infections are still on the rise. In 2012, 347 000 people in the region were living with HIV, a 127% increase over the number living with HIV in 2001. Antiretroviral therapy (ART) however, has transformed the global HIV response mitigating the human costs of HIV and playing a vital role in slowing the further spread of the virus.

Across the region, HIV testing and treatment services are available, but several factors limit access for people in need: lack of awareness; fear of stigma and discrimination in families, workplaces, communities and in health care facilities prevent people from taking an HIV test; and seeking care. As a result, an estimated 80% of people living with HIV in the region are still not aware that they are carrying HIV.

The good news is that some countries have achieved considerably higher HIV testing and treatment coverage than the regional average. Countries that have decentralized and integrated HIV service delivery into the health system and engaged civil society and private providers have succeeded in achieving much better coverage than those that have not.

This initiative calls upon leaders to commit to urgent action to increase access to HIV treatment in the region. “Treatment is fundamental to achieving an AIDS-free generation, in addition to reducing morbidity and mortality, HIV treatment also reduces transmission. We cannot let this opportunity remain untapped. We must do more to garner both the individual and the public health benefits of treatment,” emphasized Dr Ala Alwan, WHO Regional Director for the Eastern Mediterranean.

## Contact

WHO: | Dr Gabriele Riedner [riednerg@who.int](mailto:riednerg@who.int)

UNAIDS | Nagwa Hassaan [hassaann@unaids.org](mailto:hassaann@unaids.org)

## About WHO

In the 21st century, health is a shared responsibility, involving equitable access to essential care and collective defence against transnational threats. WHO is the directing and coordinating authority for health within the United Nations system. It is responsible for providing leadership on global health matters, shaping the health research agenda, setting norms and standards, articulating evidence-based policy options, providing technical support to countries and monitoring and assessing health trends.

## About UNAIDS

The Joint United Nations Programme on HIV/AIDS (UNAIDS) leads and inspires the world to achieve its shared vision of zero new HIV infections, zero discrimination and zero AIDS-related deaths. UNAIDS unites the efforts of 11 UN organizations – United Nations Office of the High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), UNICEF, World Food Programme (WFP), United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA), United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC), UN Women, International Labour Organization (ILO), United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO), WHO and the World Bank – and works closely with global and national partners to maximize results for the AIDS response. Learn more at [unaids.org](https://unaids.org) and connect with us on Facebook and Twitter.

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