

It is a great pleasure to celebrate with you World Health Day on the 7th of April, which, each year, marks the anniversary of the founding of the World Health Organization in 1948. The topic this year is Ageing and Health and the theme is “Good health adds life to years”.

Over the past few years, the population of the world, including those who live in the Eastern Mediterranean Region, has continued its remarkable demographic transition from high birth and high death rates to lower birth rates, lower death rates and increased life expectancy. The number of older people is increasing worldwide, and in this region, and it will continue to rise rapidly in the next decade, to reach, in this region, almost 9% of the population by 2025 and 15% by 2050. This has major implications for health and socioeconomic development.

Moreover, the growing number of older people means that more and more people are at risk of chronic noncommunicable diseases, like heart disease, stroke, diabetes and cancer. Therefore, population ageing and delivery of health care services to the elderly will present new and serious challenges for national health care systems in the Region.

What is required is a comprehensive, collaborative response to population ageing. We need to provide integrated health and social care, to enhance family and social support, and to reduce the burden of disease and disability.

The theme of World Health Day this year is how good health throughout life can help older men and women to lead full and productive lives, and continue to be a source of support and wisdom to their families and communities.



Dr Ala Alwan, Regional Director for the Eastern Mediterranean Most of us can expect to live longer than ever before. Many middle-aged and older adults will have living parents and will live to see their great-grandchildren. While we may stay young at heart, our bodies are inevitably ageing. The rate of decline is determined, at least in part, by our behaviours and exposures across the whole life-course. This includes what we eat, how physically active we are and the extent to which we are exposed to health risks, such as those caused by smoking. It is also determined by the measures being taken to prevent and control health conditions like diabetes, high blood pressure, heart disease and cancer.

WHO promotes a healthy lifestyle throughout the life-course, in order to save lives, protect health and alleviate disability and suffering in old age. Age-friendly environments foster the health and participation of older people. Access to basic age-friendly primary health care, long-term care and supportive care is essential. Early detection of disease, as well as prevention and care, improves the well-being of older people.

Population ageing could slow down progress in human development unless serious action is initiated now to plan for an environment and services that are conducive to healthy ageing. With this year's World Health Day campaign, I hope the Region will go beyond awareness-raising, to take concrete action and produce positive change.

Let's work together to create societies which appreciate and acknowledge older people as valued resources; societies which enable them to participate fully in the community, and which help protect and improve health as we age.

May God bless our older people and enable them to add life to years.

Dr Ala Alwan, Regional Director for the Eastern Mediterranean

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