19 April 2020 – Thalassemia is an inherited blood disorder. Specialized care across the lifespan of a thalassemia patient can help them lead a normal and healthy life. Thalassemia is a treatable disorder that can be well managed with blood transfusions and chelation drugs.

Patients suffering from thalassemia and blood disorders are benefiting from services provided by the national blood and transfusion centres supported by the Emergency Health and Nutrition Project.

In 2019, WHO in partnership with the World Bank's International Development Association (IDA), under the framework of the Emergency Health and Nutrition Project supported national blood transfusion centres in Sana’a, Aden, Al Hudaydah, Taiz, Abyan, Al Mukalla and Ibb
governorates. In addition to establishing new ones in Sayoun and Hajjah. Thanks to this partnership, in 2019 alone, over 73,500 people were provided with life-saving blood transfusion services.

Ayman is 18 years old, he is one of the thalassemia patients who has been receiving regular treatment. He has been a patient since he was 2 years old. “Thanks to regular treatment and transfusion, I was able to graduate from school and enrol at the university,” says Ayman.

And while blood transfusions are a life-saving treatment for many people with thalassemia; the transfusions do involve challenges. Iron overload is the major consequence of regular blood transfusion, excess iron will be deposited in human body, If the excess iron is not removed, it can cause damage to the heart, liver, and endocrine system making iron overload the major cause of morbidity for thalassemia patients. This is why chelation drugs are a critical part of treatment to help the patient’s body eliminate iron overload.

Dr Abdulla Mohammed has worked as a pharmacist for 9 years. “Patients with hereditary blood disorders seek medication to find a second chance at life, but sometimes critical drugs are not available in the country or too expensive that patients can’t afford it,” he says.
Dr Abdulla Mohammed has worked as a pharmacist for 9 years serving patients with blood disorders. More needs to be done.

Rasha Mohammed Ali has worked as a health worker for 2 years now. “I receive around 70 patients per day, the work force is not enough to cover the load,” she says.

In the busy laboratory, laboratory technicians Rahma and Huda work tirelessly for long hours. “The burden is massive, and many people coming in are in critical condition. Available laboratory reagents do not cover the need, and some of the equipment needs to be replaced or requires maintenance,” says Rahma.

More needs to be done to fill the gap and provide the needed blood transfusions and medical care to thalassemia patients in Yemen.

About the Emergency Health and Nutrition Project
WHO with its technical partners the World Bank and UNICEF, under the Emergency Health and Nutrition Project, are meeting health needs in Yemen. The Project is a cross-cutting response framework designed specifically to provide basic health and nutrition services to meet acute health needs, supporting the national system in the midst of war.

It supports 72 hospitals across Yemen with a suite of essential life-saving health services through the health service delivery mechanism known as the Minimum Service Package. WHO and the World Bank are also working with UNICEF to strengthen the referral system from the primary, secondary, to the tertiary levels of care. In addition, the Emergency Health and Nutrition Project is supporting public health programmes and disease response to outbreaks, such as cholera and diphtheria, to name a few.