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WHO event addressing public health priorities

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[1]Summary report of the Eastern Mediterranean Region intercountry dialogue on the WHO Acceleration Plan to STOP Obesity. https://applications.emro.who.int/docs/WHOEMNUT311E-eng.pdf .

Introduction

There have been concerns about the increasing rate of obesity and overweight among adults and children in the Eastern Mediterranean Region (EMR). Globally, 10.8% of males and 14.9% of females are obese, while the prevalence of obesity and overweight ranges from 25.0% to 81.9% in the Eastern Mediterranean countries (1,2).

Obesity has dire consequences for the health and well-being of populations because it is a risk factor for other chronic health conditions such as depression, cardiovascular disease, diabetes, and hypertension. Hence the need to make substantial investments in its control (2).

The WHO Regional Office for the Eastern Mediterranean (WHO/EMRO) has been supporting its

Member States to develop and implement national strategies and action plans to address overweight and obesity in their countries as part of a wider WHO strategy to combat obesity (3,4). In October 2022, WHO/EMRO held the first regional intercountry dialogue for EMR countries to discuss the WHO Acceleration Plan to STOP Obesity (5).

Summary of discussions

Participants discussed the acceleration plan, including its 5 workstreams and implementation plan; regional and country initiatives to tackle obesity; country engagement, goal-setting and problem-solving approaches; policy priorities and regional framework to scale-up action on obesity; and the development of country acceleration roadmaps. The meeting featured presentations reflecting lessons learnt from France, Saudi Arabia and the United Kingdom on interventions to curb obesity and overweight.

The new WHO obesity technical package, which is part of the acceleration plan, has 7 areas of intervention, namely: fiscal policies, marketing food and beverages, food labelling, early food environments, public food procurement, building capacity in the health system to deliver obesity management services and innovations, and tools for impact modelling and service delivery.

The country teams presented their assessments of obesity, including the risk factors, policies, interventions, and priorities, as well as the governance, accountability and data challenges affecting service delivery. The teams further analyzed the causes of obesity in their countries, identified and prioritized their intervention goals based on the acceleration plan. They developed a stakeholder engagement strategy and an implementation monitoring plan.

Recommendations

WHO/EMRO was requested to organize virtual sessions to finalize the country roadmaps and periodic meetings to discuss progress, challenges and share lessons. Member States were requested to identify and present focal persons for the development of their country roadmaps.

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