



10 October 2023, Tehran – Today is World Mental Health Day, a chance for people and communities to unite behind the theme “Mental health is a universal human right”. The aim of the global day is to improve knowledge, raise awareness, and drive actions that promote and protect everyone’s mental health as a universal human right.

WHO, in collaboration with the Ministry of Health and Medical Education of the Islamic Republic of Iran, supported the Iran Dementia and Alzheimer’s Disease Association in planning the country’s first national training of trainers workshop on dementia and Alzheimer’s disease. The 40-hour training package, the roll-out of which will continue until the end of 2023, has been designed to enhance the skills and knowledge of caregivers and family members who care for loved ones at home, and social workers who work in elderly care homes. The project aims to increase public awareness of the preventable nature of the conditions and address the stigma and discrimination associated with both conditions.

Dementia and Alzheimer’s disease have long been neglected, with many people believing that they are inevitable consequences of ageing. These conditions are, however, serious public health issues. They cost the global economy about US\$ 1.3 trillion per year and are the seventh leading cause of death worldwide.

In the Islamic Republic of Iran, a 2016 survey revealed that 8% of the population aged over 60 years had dementia, with varying rates across provinces and higher rates among women. Shockingly, one person develops dementia in the country every 7 minutes. This highlights the urgent need for increased awareness, support and resources to address this growing issue.

Cascade training was selected as the optimal strategy to reach as many caregivers as possible. Fourteen provinces were targeted for the national training of trainers workshop, based on criteria such as a large population of elderly people, a large number of nursing homes, the presence of active provincial associations for Alzheimer's disease, and commitment to the cause of dementia. The 5-day workshop included presentations, group work and visits to day care centres. On the last day of the first national workshop, participants developed their own action plans for cascade training in their respective provinces. The training is thus expected to reach more than 800 caregivers across the country in the first phase.

This project is a crucial step towards improving the quality of life for those living with dementia and Alzheimer's disease in the Islamic Republic of Iran. By increasing care providers' knowledge and skills, raising awareness of the preventable nature of the conditions, and addressing stigma and discrimination, we can delay the onset of the conditions and reduce their severity.

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