31 October 2023, Doha, Qatar – Her Excellency Dr Hanan Mohammed Al Kuwari, Minister of Public Health of Qatar, today inaugurated the 3-day Eastern Mediterranean Region Healthy Cities Conference 2023, organized by the Ministry of Public Health and the World Health Organization (WHO).

The opening ceremony was attended by Dr Ahmed Al-Mandhari, WHO Regional Director for the Eastern Mediterranean, and senior officials and representatives of 15 countries of the Region.

“Healthy Cities: A Multisectoral Approach to Health and Well-being” is the main theme of the conference, at which 43 local and international experts will speak. About 1300 participants are expected to attend the conference in total, both in person and online, over the 3 days.

H.E. Dr Al Kuwari, Minister of Public Health, said: “Qatar works to promote the health and well-being of the population and achieve sustainability, guided by the wise vision of His Highness Sheikh Tamim bin Hamad Al Thani, Emir of the State of Qatar, and to achieve the Qatar National Vision 2030. The Healthy Cities programme serves the country’s efforts in this regard, and we are proud that Qatar is the first country where all municipalities received the title of Healthy City from the World Health Organization, in addition to Qatar Foundation’s Education City being recognized as a Healthy Education City and Qatar University as a Healthy University.”

The Minister went on to stress how the Healthy Cities approach aims to make health a priority for cities, by promoting health, equity, and sustainable development, adding: “Qatar has adopted this approach, and translated it into strategic initiatives, policies and best practices by following the ‘Health in All Policies’ strategic priority and with close cooperation between various sectors in the country. We are pleased that through this conference we can exchange knowledge and experiences with other countries of the Eastern Mediterranean Region and with WHO Healthy City Networks across various regions."

H.E. Dr Al Kuwari also expressed her confidence that the strengthening of Healthy Cities movement will contribute to enhance cooperation in advancing urban health strategies in the Region to promote health and well-being.

Inspiration for further expansion of Healthy Cities

Dr Ahmed Al-Mandhari, WHO Regional Director for the Eastern Mediterranean, reiterated the Healthy Cities programme's important role in creating a multisectoral platform for health promotion and well-being: "Healthy Cities can contribute to accelerate the achievement of our regional and global objectives and our progress towards the health-related Sustainable Development Goals. They can also contribute to combat noncommunicable diseases and support the regional implementation of the new 'Global framework for integrating well-being into public health utilizing a health promotion approach'."

Dr Al-Mandhari added: "The programme has made remarkable progress in the WHO Eastern Mediterranean Region, with the Regional Healthy Cities Network expanding dramatically, from 64 cities in 11 countries in 2019 to 111 cities in 15 countries in 2023. We are aware of the challenges that prevent many of our countries and territories from making progress in the shift to Healthy Cities, but we are also sure that there are more opportunities than ever to do so. To make Healthy Cities a reality, planning must consider both the challenges and the opportunities, in line with the regional vision of 'Health for All by All'."

The Regional Director also thanked Qatar's Ministry of Public Health for co-organizing the conference. The event serves as inspiration to other WHO Member States to support the expansion of Healthy Cities within and across the Region's countries.

In the keynote address, Professor Sir Michael Marmot, Director of the UCL Institute of Health Equity, University College London, spoke about Healthy Cities as a multisectoral platform to address the social determinants of health.

Conference objectives and programme

The conference aims to explore how to scale up the Healthy Cities approach across the Eastern Mediterranean Region in line with WHO's Thirteenth General Programme of Work, the Sustainable Development Goals and the regional Vision 2023 goal of "Health for All by All". The conference also aims to contribute to advance urban health strategies, leading the way towards healthier cities and communities across the Region and beyond.

With the participation of a group of local and international experts, the conference will review the

Healthy Cities movement within the Region at the city level, as well as Qatar's experience in this field.

The conference includes 4 workshops to discuss tackling obesity in urban environments; the Healthy Cities and Urban Environments Network; physical activity and the urban environment; and behavioural sciences for better health. Panel discussions will explore Healthy Cities as a multisectoral approach to health and well-being; the impact and legacy of major sporting events on health and well-being in cities; and how to address climate change in dry urban environments.

The Healthy City programme adopts a collaborative, cross-sectoral approach to improve health and equity for all residents by integrating health considerations and impacts into all decision-making processes.

For more details on the Eastern Mediterranean Region Healthy Cities Conference 2023, see the Ministry of Public Health- Health In All policies website, at: https://hiap.moph.gov.qa/EMRConf2023/En/Pages/speakers.aspx

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