5 March 2024, Rabat, Morocco -– In a world facing numerous challenges, achieving universal health coverage remains crucial. More than half of the global population- -– some 4.5 billion people -– lack full access to essential health care. In addition, over 2 billion people experience **fi nancial hardship in accessing basic health care**
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Social inequities and barriers in access to health care most affect the poorest, most discriminated against and marginalized people globally. This has catastrophic impacts on their health and well-being.

Dr Hanan Balkhy, WHO Regional Director for the Eastern Mediterranean, highlighted the struggle regionally: “Improving access to health care and medical products in the WHO Eastern Mediterranean Region is not progressing as fast as in other WHO regions, and we have large disparities between and within Member States.”

“One of my key priorities is to address this gap by tackling the challenges facing the health workforce and the supply chain in the Region,” added Dr Balkhy. “This will not be possible without improving the efficiency of planning, budget allocation and spending on health.”

One in every 8 people in the Region faces financial hardship due to health care costs, spending over 10% of their income on out-of-pocket payments. More than half of the countries and territories of the Region have grappled with emergencies in recent years and currently there are 19 graded emergencies. Noncommunicable diseases are also on the rise in the Region, further straining health systems.

A multifaceted approach is needed to address these issues. Reforming and strengthening health financing is vital. This work should be informed by resolution EM/RC69/R.4 of the Regional Committee for the Eastern Mediterranean and the Lancet Global Health Commission on financing primary health care. Prioritizing equity, financial protection and universal health coverage is paramount.

To achieve this, it is crucial to promote efficient planning, resource allocation, and spending. Hence, the present meeting, at which the Regional Office, with partners the Global Fund and World Bank, brings together ministries of health, finance and social development, along with relevant development partners and donors, to foster a more integrated and effective approach to health financing. This will help ensure that sufficient resources are mobilized and allocated more efficiently and equitably across the spectrum of health care in the Region. This meeting has only been made possible thanks to the support of the Ministry of Health of Morocco.

It is time for countries, partners and people to come together to deliver on universal health coverage, by making health services available, accessible, acceptable and of good quality for everyone, everywhere.

Related links

Resolution EM/RC69/R.4

Lancet Global Health Commission on financing primary health care

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