

Sixty-sixth session of the WHO Regional Committee for the Eastern Mediterranean, Tehran, Islamic Republic of Iran, 14–17 October 2019

Summary report by the Chairman, H.E. Dr Saeed Namaki, Minister of Health and Medical Education, Islamic Republic of Iran

PART 1: TOPICS FOR GLOBAL DISCUSSION

A suggestion was made to produce short summary documents regarding all the topics for global discussion below in order to summarize the current status and reach consensus on the best way forward. It was agreed that WHO's Regional Office would pursue this.

Thirteenth General Programme of Work, 2019–2023 – Results framework: an update

The Regional Committee received an update on the Results Framework of the Thirteenth General Programme of Work, 2019–2023, noting that the framework was to be presented to the Executive Board at its 146th session in January 2020. The Committee had no significant feedback on the framework.

Development of a global strategy for tuberculosis research and innovation

The Committee discussed the development of a global strategy for tuberculosis research and innovation. The example was given of the development of the national action plan on tuberculosis in the Islamic Republic of Iran, and the five strategic areas of the plan were highlighted. It was suggested that consideration might be given to establishing a global high-level committee to guide work in this area.

Summary of the draft global strategy on digital health

The Committee was presented with a summary of the draft global strategy on digital health. There was clear support for this initiative in this fast-moving area, and thanks were expressed to WHO for its efforts in taking it forward. The suggestion was made that as part of the process of global consultation a package of best practices and lessons learned might be developed to avoid previous mistakes as countries address the legislative and other challenges. Examples of national initiatives already under way were then given. WHO specifically commended Libya for the recent progress made in this area.

Draft global strategy to accelerate cervical cancer elimination

The Committee was presented with the draft global strategy to accelerate cervical cancer elimination. Representatives acknowledged the importance of this global strategy. They noted a need for accurate and reliable data as there were well-recognized gaps in the available information, for example on the incidence of cervical cancer in individual countries. Concerns were also raised about the current low uptake of screening programmes in the Region. Accelerating the elimination of cervical cancer will require ensuring the supply of, and access to, affordable vaccines, and procurement processes therefore need to be established. Potential approaches to increasing the supply and availability of vaccines included the implementation of a collective regional procurement mechanism, possibly with WHO support, and Gavi

applications by eligible countries. The issue of Gavi eligibility criteria and their potential revision, including in relation to emergency-affected countries, was highlighted.

Global strategy and action plan on ageing and health

The Committee was presented with an overview of the development of a proposal for a Decade of Healthy Ageing 2020–2030, and a summary of the draft proposal.

WHO presence in countries, territories and areas

The Committee was presented with an overview both of WHO's current country presence and of plans for an enhanced future country presence for the Organization.

PART 2: TOPICS OF REGIONAL SIGNIFICANCE

Regional implementation framework on ending preventable newborn, child and adolescent deaths and improving health and development

The Committee endorsed the newborn, child and adolescent health implementation framework for the Eastern Mediterranean Region, 2019–2023.¹ There was broad agreement that ending preventable deaths among newborns, children and adolescents in the Region and improving their health and development was a major priority. Notable obstacles to progress included a lack of reliable data, poorly accessible and poorly integrated health services for pregnant women and mothers, and conflict and emergencies. The importance of nutrition, accident prevention and improved collaboration with, and regulation of, the private health care sector were also discussed. Representatives called upon WHO to provide further support to countries in implementing the framework.

Strengthening the nursing workforce to advance universal health coverage in the Eastern Mediterranean Region

Representatives agreed that midwives and nurses had an important and cost-effective role in service delivery, including for primary health care and emergency response. However, there were often shortages of nurses and midwives in their countries. Challenges in attracting sufficient nurses included low wages and status, a lack of specialized training, insufficient career development and the lack of security in certain areas of some countries. The maldistribution of nurses and midwives across countries, especially in rural areas, was another problem. To address these challenges, representatives noted the need to raise the profile and status of nursing, establish professional bodies and national councils, enhance the training and education of nurses and midwives, train midwives and nurses in primary health care and telehealth/ehealth, and view nurses as part of an integrated medical team. Member States were urged to strengthen their nursing and midwifery workforces and develop specific activities marking 2020 as the Year of the Nurse and Midwife.²

¹ EM/RC66/R.2.

² EM/RC66/R.3.

Introducing the framework for action for the hospital sector in the Eastern Mediterranean Region

The Committee endorsed the framework for action for the hospital sector in the Eastern Mediterranean.³ Representatives welcomed the principle of integrating hospitals within people-centred health systems focused on primary health care, while highlighting the need to adapt the framework to each country's health system infrastructure and capacities. They stressed the need for hospital accreditation systems, and for better regulation of the private hospital sector. They recommended that WHO develop a training-of-trainers course for hospital managers to equip them with formal management training. Hospitals were needed for specialized services; minor surgery and basic procedures could be provided at primary health care centres to improve accessibility, ensure equitable access to services and reduce costs. WHO should facilitate experience-sharing between countries to help spread best practice.

Developing national institutional capacity for evidence-informed policy-making for health

The Committee endorsed the framework for action to improve national institutional capacity for the use of evidence in health policy-making in the Eastern Mediterranean Region.⁴ Experiences were shared from several countries, including both the development of dedicated national health research/information institutions and initiatives to draw on existing domestic and international academic expertise. Many challenges were noted regarding countries' limited capacities to generate, collect and exploit high-quality data and research, and sustained capacity-building support from WHO was requested. It was also noted that technological changes posed both new challenges and opportunities. There was some support for the idea of a Region-wide project or institution to develop sources and analyses of evidence, thereby leveraging maximum value from the limited resources available.

Accelerating regional implementation of the Political Declaration of the Third United Nations High-level Meeting of the General Assembly on the Prevention and Control of Noncommunicable Diseases 2018

The Committee endorsed an updated framework for action to implement the United Nations Political Declaration on NCDs, including indicators to assess country progress by 2030,⁵ and also endorsed the framework for action on acute rheumatic fever and rheumatic heart disease in the Eastern Mediterranean Region and the strategy on nutrition for the Eastern Mediterranean Region, 2020–2030.⁶ Representatives voiced support for integrating NCD prevention and control within primary health care and emergency responses, and adopting a multisectoral approach. Ensuring a supportive legislative/policy framework, improving NCD surveillance and focusing on NCD prevention, including through awareness-raising campaigns in the media and schools, screening programmes and the use of taxation on tobacco products and sugary drinks were all cited as important elements in NCD control. However, there was concern about pricing of medicines, particularly for cancer treatment, and about the availability of counterfeit medicines in some countries.

³ EM/RC66/R.4.

⁴ EM/RC66/R.5.

⁵ EM/RC66/R.6.

⁶ EM/RC66/R.1.

Regional framework for action on strengthening the public health response to substance use

The Committee endorsed the regional framework for action to strengthen the public health response to substance use.⁷ Representatives agreed that addressing substance abuse was a high priority, and noted that SDG 3 included a specific target on its prevention and treatment. The response required the development of national action plans based on interventions in the framework, close collaboration between countries and relevant United Nations agencies, a multisectoral approach between ministries and coordinated action from a range of actors. Representatives requested that the WHO Regional Office collect and disseminate data to determine the true extent of the problem. The use of *khat* among youth was cited as a real concern in some countries, and there was also a need to address the “neglected” issue of alcohol use in the Region. Representatives cited the need for training among first-line health workers in health care centres and development of a specialized workforce to increase competencies in this field.

⁷ EM/RC66/R.7.