

Provisional agenda item 3a: Building resilient health systems to advance universal health coverage and ensure health security in the Eastern Mediterranean Region

Alzheimer's Disease International, the federation of 105 Alzheimer and dementia associations from across the world would like to commend the EMRO secretariat and relevant Member States for the focus of this agenda item. ADI is particularly pleased to note the numerous references to vulnerable populations, particularly regional priority 5 in the annex which aims to 'Properly sequence expanding coverage and make the case for focusing on the poorest and vulnerable first, pursuing the implementation of the Salalah Declaration on the Road to UHC in the Eastern Mediterranean Region'.

Further noting the context of this agenda item incorporating learnings from the COVID-19 Pandemic, we would like to draw the attention of Member States and the EMRO secretariate to older persons, particularly those living with caring for those with dementia. Data from numerous Member States is suggesting that those living with dementia have been disproportionately impacted by the COVID-19 pandemic, with some Member States globally reporting mortality figures as high as 40% in this population. Other Member States actively deprioritised treatment for those living with dementia, restricting access to ventilators and other essential treatments. In light of this we would like to remind Member States and the EMRO secretariat that dementia is recognised as a disability both by the WHO and the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD).

As we look beyond the COVID-19 pandemic, we would like to further highlight the ongoing global public health crisis of dementia. Currently there are estimated to be around 55 million people living with the condition, a number expected to rise to 139 by 2050. Recent data by the Institute of Health Metrics and Evaluation predicts that the highest increases in the prevalence of dementia will occur in North Africa and the Middle East, with some Member States forecasts to have increases of over 1800% by 2050. Economically dementia costs the global economy \$1.3 trillion USD dollars, a figure set to increase to \$2.8 trillion USD by 2030. It is for this reason that we encourage all Member States to act without delay.

To mitigate these forecasts and better to prepare EMRO Member States for unavoidable increases in the prevalence of this condition in the region, we recommend that all Member States commit to implementing a National Dementia Plan covering all seven action areas of the WHO Global Action Plan on the public health response to dementia. The contents of this plan outline strategies in which Member States can mitigate the oncoming wave of dementia through risk reduction, with some studies suggesting that up to 40% of cases of dementia can be delayed or prevented. In addition to preparing healthcare systems, community and society to better care and support those living with dementia and their carers under the Universal Health Coverage agenda.

Best wishes,

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