



Message from

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on the occasion of  
**WORLD HEALTH DAY**  
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“The right to health for all people” and universal health coverage are two sides of the same coin, the impetus of WHO’s work since its foundation. On 7 April 2018, we celebrate WHO’s 70th anniversary, and the 40th anniversary of the Alma-Ata Declaration on primary health care, which set the goal of “health for all”. These important coinciding events make World Health Day 2018 a very special one, the theme of which is, appropriately, “universal health coverage: everyone, everywhere.”

Universal health coverage means that everyone should have access to the quality health services they need, when and where they need them, without suffering financial hardship. Unfortunately, in the Eastern Mediterranean Region, around 55.5 million individuals face financial hardship and around 7.7 million are pushed into poverty every year because of excessive out-of-pocket payment.

It is the responsibility of every country and national government to ensure universal health coverage. WHO and its Member States have been working closely to achieve this visionary goal, especially since the Alma-Ata Declaration of 1978 on primary health care and “health for all”, using this motto as a guiding vision for more than seven decades. WHO’s focus on universal health coverage has gained new momentum and renewed commitment, as we progress towards achieving the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), with the target of at least 1 billion more people having access to essential health services by 2023. This would not only improve the overall

well-being of communities, but would also enhance socioeconomic development, gender equality, education, nutrition, poverty reduction and other SDGs.

Strengthening health systems is vital for sustainably improving and protecting health and achieving universal health coverage. This is especially critical as almost two thirds of countries in the Region are directly or indirectly affected by emergencies. Half of the world's internally displaced populations are living in countries of the Region and more than 60% of the world's refugees and migrants originate from the Region. For this reason, our regional theme on World Health Day is universal health coverage for refugees and migrants.

This World Health Day, let's shine a spotlight on the need for universal health coverage – and on the advantages it can bring. Let us pledge our commitment to “health for all”, without discrimination, leaving no one behind.

Thank you.