

**Message from**

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**on the occasion of**  
**WORLD NO TOBACCO DAY**

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This year, World No Tobacco Day focuses on “Tobacco and Heart Disease”.

The campaign aims to increase awareness of the link between tobacco use in all its forms and cardiovascular disease, which is the world’s leading cause of death. At the same time, it highlights action that key audiences – including cardiovascular communities and specialists, governments and the public – can take to reduce the risks to heart health related to tobacco use.

Globally, cardiovascular disease is the leading cause of death and disease in most countries in WHO’s Eastern Mediterranean Region. In 2015, nearly 1.4 million deaths in the Region were caused by cardiovascular disease. It has been estimated that in the next decade, deaths from cardiovascular disease, which in the Eastern Mediterranean Region is mostly attributable to ischemic heart disease, will increase more significantly than in any other region of the world except Africa.

Tobacco use in the Eastern Mediterranean Region is alarming. Around 38% of men and 4% of women are smokers, and smoking is expected to rise by 2025, contrary to the trend for all other WHO regions. This will lead to an escalating epidemic of cardiovascular disease regionally, as tobacco use is a key risk factor for the development of coronary heart disease, stroke and peripheral vascular disease.

The harms that all types of tobacco use can cause to heart health are well understood in medical and scientific circles, and solutions to reduce related death and disease are available, including full implementation of the WHO Framework Convention on Tobacco Control. However, large sections of the public do not realize that tobacco is one of the leading causes of cardiovascular disease.

Countries in the Region need to take all possible action and make every effort to control tobacco use and raise public awareness of the link between tobacco use and heart disease. This will help to reduce cardiovascular disease in the Region.

WHO and its partners have developed technical packages to support countries in their efforts to limit tobacco use and so contain this cardiovascular disease epidemic at national and regional levels. Research has shown that 1.13 million deaths due to cardiovascular disease could be avoided in 20 low- and middle-income countries, including three countries in the Eastern Mediterranean Region: Egypt, the Islamic Republic of Iran and Pakistan.

WHO's Global Hearts Initiative can save many millions of lives by ramping up proven measures to prevent CVD in communities and countries, including taxing tobacco, reducing salt in foods, detecting and treating people at high risk and strengthening primary health care services.

Nineteen countries in the Region are parties to the WHO Framework Convention on Tobacco Control, the first evidence-based international treaty, and are obliged to implement its different policies comprehensively. This will reduce tobacco use and consequently cardiovascular disease levels in the Region.

On this World No Tobacco Day, I call upon everyone – governments, advocates, academics, cardiovascular specialists and civil society groups – to join efforts to end the tobacco epidemic and its devastating consequences.