

**Message from**

**DR AHMED AL-MANDHARI**  
**REGIONAL DIRECTOR**  
**WHO EASTERN MEDITERRANEAN REGION**  
**on the occasion of**  
**WORLD FAMILY DOCTOR DAY**

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It is with great pleasure that the World Health Organization joins the World Organization of Family Doctors (WONCA) and Member States in celebrating World Family Doctor Day.

This occasion highlights the crucial role of family doctors in health care systems around the world.

Now is the time to reaffirm the importance of family practice programmes designed to provide quality primary health care and so accelerate progress towards universal health coverage in the WHO Eastern Mediterranean Region.

Last year marked the fortieth anniversary of the Declaration of Alma-Ata, which identified primary health care as essential to attain Health for All. On 25 and 26 October 2018, world leaders renewed their commitment to strengthen primary health care as part of efforts to achieve universal health coverage and the Sustainable Development Goals. This commitment was expressed in the Astana Declaration.

The Astana Declaration emphasizes the need to modernize primary health care and address current and future challenges in health systems while maintaining the core values and principles present in the original Alma-Ata Declaration of 1978.

WHO recognizes family practice as a strategic priority to strengthen health systems. Accordingly, WHO's Regional Office for the Eastern Mediterranean is undertaking many activities to promote and support the introduction and expansion of family practice in the Region.

WHO is producing a range of information resources on family practice in the Region, to support the work of health care professionals and inform policy discussions. Materials released in the past year include training manuals, operational guides, country profiles and advocacy videos.

Furthermore, WHO recently collaborated with WONCA to publish *Family practice in the Eastern Mediterranean Region: universal health coverage and quality primary care*, a new book for policy-makers, health professionals, health educators and health profession students which examines how to improve primary health care in a wide range of different country settings, including in countries facing health emergencies.

The Regional Office is also taking action to help Member States overcome the shortage of family doctors in the Region. In collaboration with WONCA and the American University of Beirut, we are developing and implementing a one-year Regional Professional Family Medicine Diploma for currently practicing general physicians as a transitional approach to full training in family medicine.

To support Member States in fulfilling their commitments under the Astana Declaration, we recently announced the PHC Measurement and Improvement Initiative (PHCMI). The PHCMI builds on a range of existing WHO initiatives and resources to develop national capacity for improving PHC based on monitoring and evaluation, including developing the family practice approach.

There are many challenges in nurturing family practice and ensuring access to health care in the Region, but WHO remains committed to help our Member States scale up family practice. Only by scaling up family practice can we strengthen primary health care to achieve universal health coverage by the year 2030.