



Message from

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on the occasion of World AIDS Day 2017

Once again, World AIDS Day has arrived to remind us of our commitment to end AIDS. This day is an occasion to look back at our progress, retrieve lessons and move forward towards this goal. Today we are better equipped than ever for moving forward. We have a wealth of evidence-based interventions and tools that enable us to broaden prevention options, simplify diagnosis, optimize treatment and save lives. All we need to do is to put these interventions and tools within the reach of people who need them.

Ending AIDS by 2030 is one of the Sustainable Development Goals that countries have endorsed and committed to across the world. In this respect, the Eastern Mediterranean Region has witnessed progress in HIV surveillance, prevention, treatment and care. Between 2012 and 2016 the number of people living with HIV receiving antiretroviral treatment increased steadily to more than double in number. In spite of this progress, however, the epidemic is still growing in the Region. Our region features the lowest coverage of HIV prevention, diagnosis, treatment and care services in the world. Eighty-five per cent (85%) of people living with HIV in the Region and who need life-saving antiretroviral therapy do not receive it.

HIV prevention remains a priority in our region, particularly among key populations at risk of HIV. HIV testing services constitute an essential part of the HIV prevention package. People at risk who test negative for HIV can use a wide range of HIV prevention services which are available to help them maintain a life without HIV.

Similarly, HIV testing is a critical step for accessing HIV treatment and care. In knowing their HIV status, people living with HIV can access treatment and care services and lead a normal life without illness. With treatment, the virus is suppressed, and transmission can be prevented.

Unfortunately our Region is facing a huge gap in diagnosis, in which only 3 out of 10 people living with HIV know their HIV status. This low case identification rate is due to many reasons including the limited availability of HIV testing services, inappropriate approaches to service delivery for people who are at risk of HIV, reluctance of health care providers to offer an HIV test to their clients and stigma and discrimination. Additionally, testing the partners of people living with HIV has long been neglected or practised in an unethical manner that deters people from testing.

Today, with the advances in HIV testing technologies and the advent of highly sensitive and specific rapid HIV tests, HIV testing has become simpler than ever. With all these advances at hand, we have no choice but fulfilling our commitment to ending AIDS by 2030. Therefore, I call upon all of us, governments, civil society, private sector and technical partners to commit to making HIV testing services available and easily accessible, particularly for key population groups at risk of HIV. HIV testing and counselling services should also be routinely offered to pregnant women, where mother-to-child transmission of HIV can be prevented.

Knowledge is power. When we know our HIV status we can make better choices for living a healthy life.
Test for HIV!

HIV is treatable
Test for HIV



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