



*In the Name of God, the Compassionate, the Merciful*

**Address by**

**DR ALA ALWAN**

**REGIONAL DIRECTOR**

**WHO EASTERN MEDITERRANEAN REGION**

**to the**

**CAPACITY-BUILDING WORKSHOP ON  
THE ROLE OF THE PRIVATE SECTOR IN MOVING TOWARDS  
UNIVERSAL HEALTH COVERAGE IN THE EASTERN MEDITERRANEAN  
REGION**

**9–12 August 2015, Cairo, Egypt**

Distinguished participants, ladies and gentlemen

It gives me great pleasure to welcome you all to this important capacity-building workshop on the role of the private sector in moving towards universal health coverage in Eastern Mediterranean Region.

The private sector has grown exponentially in most countries of the Region over the past several decades and it remains a key untapped partner in progress towards universal health coverage. However, challenges remain concerning the private sector, including unregulated expansion, lack of accreditation programmes; duality of workforce practice between the private and public sectors; irrational use of biomedical devices and technologies; non-prescription sale of antibiotics resulting in antimicrobial resistance, outdated regulations, inadequate regulatory control on quality, and limited availability of data. In addition to this, there is limited capacity of ministries of health to formulate policies and fulfil regulatory responsibility. Regulation, information provision and purchasing of services remain important tools for harnessing the role of the private sector in the move towards strategic universal health coverage goals.

In general, the private sector has grown with little policy direction guiding its growth. Private sector utilization is particularly high in countries of the Region where public sector spending on health is low, which demonstrates that the private sector has emerged as a consequence of insufficient or under-performing public sector services in many countries. Essential

information on private sector composition, service coverage, quality and pricing continues to be patchy.

Ladies and gentlemen

Mapping and partnering with the private health sector was a health system strengthening priority endorsed by the 59th session of the Regional Committee in resolution EM/RC59/R.3. Following this, the Regional Office took steps to create regional initiatives to promote the role of the private sector in moving towards universal health coverage. The importance of partnership with the private sector is increasingly being acknowledged by ministries of health, and policies for its engagement are evolving across the Region.

Countries have been partnering with the private sector for various reasons and using various modalities of contractual arrangements. In the Region, the example of Afghanistan partnering with the nongovernmental sector to ensure the provision of a Basic Package of Health Services and an Essential Package of Hospital Services has been a successful one. In Lebanon, the Ministry of Public Health has a long tradition of contracting with the private sector to ensure provision of health services. Lessons from global experiences in partnering with the private sector have been mixed and success has always been dependent on fulfilling a set of policy and structural prerequisites.

Some relevant interventions carried out by the Regional Office from 2013 to 2015 include: assessment of private sector regulation in Egypt, Lebanon, Morocco and Yemen; development of a roadmap to engage the private sector in moving towards universal health coverage; assessment of quality and cost of inpatient and outpatient departments in selected private health care facilities in Jordan, Lebanon, Morocco, Pakistan and Saudi Arabia; and convening of a regional workshop on strategic purchasing for universal health coverage and how to implement innovative provider payment methods.

Dear participants

Over the next 6 months, it is expected that with the skills acquired from this workshop you will better comprehend the challenges in countries of the Region. This improved understanding will help formulate an evidence-based strategy to enhance the role and contribution of the private health sector in achieving public health goals in the Region. Following this event, WHO will support Member States to establish effective national regulatory frameworks and build capacity to develop public–private partnerships through the most appropriate strategies or models that fit with each national situation.

During the next four days, we will our build capacity to effectively assess the private health sector. We will propose practical steps to enhance its regulation and look at how to promote

and improve partnership with the private health sector. We will share the necessary tools and instruments, global and regional experiences, and reflect on the lessons learned, and explore various contractual arrangements with the private sector, exploring linkages between financing and contracting in detail. A special session will be devoted to the role of social health insurance in facilitating public–private partnerships. This is a new area of work and we have a team of highly experienced facilitators to assist you. We encourage you to dive deep and benefit from this opportunity to develop skills related to different aspects of the private health sector assessment.

I wish you a successful meeting.