



Message from
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FOR THE EASTERN MEDITERRANEAN

on the occasion of
WORLD AIDS DAY 2022
1 December 2022

On World AIDS Day, we renew our commitment to ending the HIV/AIDS epidemic. In October this year, countries in WHO's Eastern Mediterranean Region expressed their support for a new regional action plan to end AIDS by 2030. The action plan adopts a health system approach to deliver HIV services integrated within the health system, along with services for hepatitis and sexually transmitted infections.

Countries have made progress in the HIV response, including in prevention, testing and treatment. This year, Oman became the first country in the Region to eliminate mother-to-child transmission of HIV and syphilis. Lebanon and Morocco also made progress towards closing the gap on the 95-95-95 targets for diagnosis, treatment and viral load suppression through building partnerships with civil society and focusing efforts on key populations. All of this shows that we can succeed in our Region.

However, we are lagging behind on most indicators. While new HIV cases and related deaths are declining worldwide, both keep growing here. At the end of 2021, only 41% of people living with HIV (PLHIV) in the Region were diagnosed, and only 27% treated. Diagnosing HIV remains the first bottleneck that challenges our response. Unaware of their status, PLHIV cannot access treatment and may unknowingly transmit the infection to others. Our HIV testing efforts miss key populations, and we fail to leverage the new technologies and approaches that would increase access. We need to expand our testing models beyond the traditional voluntary counselling and testing centres. I call on countries to consider HIV self-testing and network-based testing as cost-effective options that could be effectively implemented in the Region.

Last year, we joined national HIV programmes and civil society organizations to implement a testing month. We used social media to create demand for testing among people most at risk of HIV. This year, we continue our "search and rescue" operations and we want to extend a helping hand to everyone at risk of illness and death if their HIV is not diagnosed or treated. Today, I announce the beginning of a new testing month in which communities will reach out to people from their networks and encourage them to get tested.

I am calling on countries to take this opportunity to increase access to HIV testing services for those in need. I am calling on communities to help save the lives of people in their networks. Together, we can make a difference and test strategically until no one is left behind. This is exactly what we mean by our regional vision of Health for All by All and we will continue this journey towards ending AIDS until we reach the goal.