



Message from
DR AHMED AL-MANDHARI
Regional Director
WHO Eastern Mediterranean Region

on the occasion of
World Hepatitis Day 2022
"Bring hepatitis care closer"



World Hepatitis Day is a reminder that we all need to honour our commitment to eliminate viral hepatitis. In 2015, the World Health Assembly adopted a strategy to eliminate hepatitis by 2030 through prevention, testing and treatment. That strategy is fully aligned with WHO's vision of "Health for All by All" in the Eastern Mediterranean Region.

In our Region, the response to viral hepatitis, particularly hepatitis C, gained momentum between 2016 and 2021. Egypt led the way with a model built on primary health care, which played a major role in treating a third of the 12 million people living with hepatitis C in the Region. However, other countries made more modest progress in the hepatitis C response and hepatitis B testing and treatment, and their efforts are still not on track. In 2020, only 2% of the estimated 18 million people with chronic hepatitis B viral infections in the Region began treatment.

To eliminate hepatitis by 2030, more effort from everyone is required. Bringing care closer to the community and everyone living with chronic viral hepatitis is the only way to improve access. This can be achieved through simplified interventions in primary health care. Last May, the World Health Assembly adopted a new strategy emphasizing the importance of services organized around people's needs rather than around diseases. Integrated services organized around people and for people offer a new path towards elimination. People-centred health services mean that people can access a coherent package of services from the different levels of the health system. This is more effective, costs less, engages patients and is more resilient in crises. Primary health care is an essential pillar of universal health coverage, and hepatitis services, including prevention, should be part of it.

COVID-19 demonstrated the importance of making health systems resilient to maintain essential health services. In this phase of recovery, we must organize our health systems around patient needs. Today, WHO calls on health authorities to decentralize essential hepatitis services, deliver them in an integrated manner, and engage communities and patient groups to expand access. On behalf of WHO, let me assure you that we will work hand in hand with countries, partners and communities to achieve hepatitis elimination in our Region. I wish all our Member States success in this critical endeavour.