

Summary report on the  
**Regional workshop on  
the implementation of  
the global action plan  
on the public health  
response to dementia  
(2017–2025)**

Doha, Qatar  
16–18 September 2023



**World Health  
Organization**

REGIONAL OFFICE FOR THE **Eastern Mediterranean**

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## **1. Introduction**

Dementia is the seventh leading cause of death and a leading contributor to disability worldwide, with over 55 million people living with dementia. Contrary to common belief, the majority of people with dementia (61%) live in low- and middle-income countries and due to the anticipated population ageing and resulting demographic change, this number is expected to rise to approximately 78 million by 2030. Dementia poses a tremendous economic burden on individuals, families and society overall and much of this burden falls on women as they have higher rates of dementia and are more likely to provide care to people living with dementia. For 2019, the total global economic cost of dementia was estimated to be US\$ 1.3 trillion, which is equivalent to 1.5% of the global gross domestic product. This number is expected to more than double by 2030, reaching US\$ 2.8 trillion, which would further undermine social and economic development globally.

To support Member States in developing national responses and to help improve the lives of people with dementia, their families and caregivers, the Seventieth World Health Assembly adopted the global action plan on the public health response to dementia 2017–2025 in 2017. The global action plan comprises seven action areas, which are: dementia as a public health priority; dementia awareness and friendliness; dementia risk reduction; dementia diagnosis, treatment, care and support; support for dementia carers; information systems for dementia; and dementia research and innovation. Most recently, a WHO report to Member States during the Seventy-sixth World Health Assembly in May 2023 indicated that urgent acceleration efforts are needed across all areas and in all countries to reach the global action plan's targets by 2025.

In this context, WHO in collaboration with the Ministry of Public Health of Qatar and the WHO Collaboration Centre for Healthy Ageing and Dementia at the Hamad Medical Corporation in Qatar, organized a

three-day regional workshop from 16 to 18 September 2023 to review and expedite progress in the implementation of the global action plan in the WHO Eastern Mediterranean Region. The workshop builds on the multi-regional workshop held in Qatar in 2022 to help devise collaborative solutions for improving public health responses to this escalating global health concern.

The objectives of the meeting were to:

- review the current status of implementation of the global action plan on the public health response to dementia 2017–2025 within the Eastern Mediterranean Region based on preliminary data submitted by countries to the Global Dementia Observatory during the second round of data collection;
- identify and address key challenges and opportunities related to dementia care, including dementia risk reduction and brain health promotion strategies, in countries of the Region;
- enhance the capacity of countries in the Region to develop comprehensive national dementia plans and implement existing plans for effective dementia care strategies that are tailored to the unique needs of the countries in the Region; and
- strengthen linkages with other relevant programmes and strategies (such as the intersectoral global action plan on epilepsy and other neurological disorders 2022–2031, UN Decade of Healthy Ageing, and others related to noncommunicable diseases and mental health).

Over three days, more than 50 representatives from ministries of health, persons with lived experience of dementia and national chapters of Alzheimer’s Disease International exchanged experiences and insights into country-specific needs, available resources and key priority areas for strengthening national dementia responses and monitoring progress.

The workshop also provided an opportunity to forge partnerships and alliances between ministries of health, civil society organizations and people living with dementia and their carers for the implementation of the actions identified as priorities for the country implementation plans discussed at the workshop.

During the workshop, the participants were introduced to WHO technical products and tools on dementia, including:

- *Towards a dementia plan: a WHO guide*, to help drive policy development;
- *Towards a dementia-inclusive society: WHO toolkit for dementia-friendly initiatives*, to help increase awareness and friendliness;
- *Risk reduction of cognitive decline and dementia: WHO guidelines*, to help reduce dementia risk;
- *mhGAP intervention guide (mhGAP IG) dementia module*, to help improve diagnosis, treatment and care;
- *iSupport for dementia*, to help implement caregiver support training;
- Global Dementia Observatory (GDO), to provide indicators to enhance monitoring for dementia and track progress across the seven strategic areas of the global action plan;
- *A blueprint for dementia research*, to foster research and innovation;
- *Optimizing brain health across the life course*, to provide guidance on optimizing brain health to help improve mental and physical health and create positive and economic impact.

## **2. Summary of discussions**

Currently, 2.3 million people live with dementia in the Eastern Mediterranean Region, and dementia is the 14th leading cause of death in the Region, where 54% of these deaths are among women. The cost of dementia reached US\$ 31.2 billion in 2019 in the Region and 91.8% of this cost is for informal care, with 74.2% of the care provided by women.

However, there is lack of awareness about dementia as a public health issue in the Region, so there is a need to systematically establish advocacy plans/programmes to raise awareness and advocate for dementia among stakeholders and to highlight its social and economic impact.

The risk factors for dementia in the Region show either a stable or upwards trend. For example, 60% of the adult population is overweight in the majority of countries in the Region and levels of physical inactivity remain high, especially among women, compared to global levels. While diabetes rates are stable, smoking rates are notably on the rise and air pollution levels are recorded to be as much as 8-fold the recommended PM2.5 levels in the majority of countries in the Region.

Since up to 40% of dementia cases are potentially preventable, investment in dementia risk reduction and prevention can reduce its health, economic and social care costs significantly.

Globally and regionally, progress towards reaching the 2025 targets of the global action plan is insufficient; for example, only eight countries in the Region are part of the global data collection platform of the Global Dementia Observatory, only eight have dementia risk reduction campaigns, and only one has reported the availability of dementia risk reduction guidelines, while just 37% of countries provide support for carers.

The majority of the workshop's participants felt that it would be more feasible to integrate dementia plans among the already-available plans for mental health and/or disability rather than as a stand-alone strategy.

While new medications have brought hope for treating dementia, there is a large gap in the diagnosis and treatment of dementia in the Region. This is partly attributable to misconceptions associated with dementia which are also pervasive among health care professionals. There is a need therefore to



address the gaps in the availability of services in all settings (urban and rural) and for all genders through the use of available tools to strengthen dementia diagnosis, treatment and care and provide support for dementia carers.

The needs of caregivers of persons with dementia, in light of the centrality of their role in the provision of care, should be identified and addressed and incentives provided to them in whatever form possible. One potential way would be to support them by employing a caregiver or providing for respite admissions.

Among the barriers highlighted in country implementation plans were the absence of allocated budgets, lack of trained workforce to provide holistic dementia care, challenges with integration across different sectors and ministries, and ongoing protracted crises in emergency countries.

In conclusion, while it was evident that there are wide variations in the available material, human and structural resources and capacities across the Region, there are also opportunities available to strengthen and expedite the public health response to dementia in all countries, irrespective of the resources available. The action areas identified by countries as priority areas include: dementia awareness and friendliness; risk reduction; dementia diagnosis, treatment and care; and support for dementia carers. All countries agreed to participate in the next round of Global Dementia Observatory data collection.

### **3. Recommendations**

The workshop concluded with recommendations to help countries promote a whole-of-society and the whole-of-government approach to ensure action across the domains of promotion, prevention, diagnosis, management, rehabilitation, end-of-life care and support for the carers of persons living with dementia.


#### *To Member States*

1. Integrate national dementia plans as part of existing plans for mental health, the elderly, disabilities and so on, and implement these plans through coordination with other sectors and fostering more effective collaboration between public, private and nongovernmental organizations and entities to overcome the paucity of resources dedicated to mental health in general and dementia in particular.
2. Develop and implement programmes to raise awareness and address the stigma and misconceptions regarding dementia.
3. Adopt a holistic approach to the diagnosis and treatment of dementia within an age-friendly health care system, while developing a coordinated and integrated care pathway to help shift to a more community-based service model to enhance the availability of care for dementia.
4. Build the knowledge and capacities of health and social care providers, including general practitioners, family physicians and nurses, in dementia diagnosis, treatment and care using the available evidence-based guidelines and tools.
5. Invest in new technologies, such as biomarkers for screening and early diagnosis, and the setting up of virtual geriatric clinics, to enhance the availability and accessibility of care.

6. Ensure that people living with dementia and their caregivers are engaged in the development of policies and legislation and in the organization of health and social care services.
7. Use the Global Dementia Observatory tool to monitor the implementation of dementia action plans in countries and guide the planning process.

*To WHO*

8. Enhance technical support to countries to expedite implementation of the global action plan on the public health responses to dementia 2017–2025 and meet the global targets by 2025.
9. Regularly convene regional workshops to exchange knowledge and lessons learnt, review country progress in implementation of their plans, and discuss emerging challenges and ways to overcome them.
10. Utilize the expertise available in global and regional centres of excellence, including WHO Collaborating Centres, to support low- and middle-income countries in the Region to develop human and technical resources for enhancing the availability of care for dementia.
11. Support innovation and research to guide policy and service development for dementia.



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