

Message from the Regional Director, WHO South-East Asia Region, on World Cancer Day 2016

We Can. I Can.



Cancer is a major cause of morbidity and mortality, with 14.1 million new cancer cases and 8.2 million deaths every year. Among these, about two thirds of global cancer cases and deaths are in low- and middle-income countries. In the South-East Asia Region alone, an estimated 1.2 million people died due to cancers in 2012. Worryingly, the world is expected to see a significant increase in cancer morbidity and mortality in years to come.

Cancer not only kills and harms cancer patients; it affects family members, coworkers and the entire society. It is not only a health issue but has wide social, economic and development implications as well. The opportunity cost incurred by patients and those that rely on them, its mental impact, the high health expenditure it creates, and the economic loss to society that cancer creates is enormous. We all know well how costly cancer treatment can be.

More than 50% of cancer cases can be prevented through reduction of cancer risk exposure and early detection. Tobacco claims 22% of global cancer deaths and 71% of global lung cancer deaths. Hepatitis B and C viruses; *Helicobacter pylori* and human papilloma virus infection; occupational and environmental carcinogens; and lifestyle risk factors also contribute to cancer.

To raise awareness about cancer prevention, early detection and control, World Cancer Day is observed every year on 4 February. The 2016–2018 theme – **‘We can. I can.’** – aims to encourage people to collectively or individually do their bit to reduce the global burden of cancer. Collectively, we can call upon every sector, particularly governments, to take action to step up their contribution on cancer prevention and control; create enabling environments for people to adopt healthy lifestyles; improve access to cancer treatment and services across the care continuum; build capacities of cancer workforce; mobilize networks to promote equity and continue to integrate cancer control in health and development agendas; shape policy change; have greater resource mobilization; and strengthen multisectoral partnerships to leverage advocacy efforts for cancer control, thus creating a united voice for a positive change.

Individually, we can start by making healthy lifestyle choices to reduce our risk of cancer and increase our knowledge of the signs and symptoms of cancer as timely treatment improves survival rates. As cancer patients and caregivers, we can ask for support to cope with cancer better; and as cancer survivors, we can share our stories to inspire others. As a larger community, we can give hope and support to cancer patients in various ways; for instance, by helping their

transition to work successfully. We as individuals can be significant agents of influence and change for all people affected by cancer.

I am proud to acknowledge that Member States in the SEA Region are taking important steps to reduce the burden of cancer and its risk factors. All Member States are working towards reducing premature mortality from noncommunicable diseases (NCDs) including cancers as a part of the global commitment. A majority of countries already have national cancer control programmes and are strengthening cancer registries. Further, Global Adult Tobacco Surveys and NCD Risk factor surveys have been conducted in most Member States. All these country-level initiatives facilitate evidence-based planning, implementation and evaluation of cancer control programmes. In 2015, the Sixty-eighth Session of the WHO Regional Committee passed a resolution to intensify cancer prevention and control, and adopted the Dili Declaration on Tobacco Control.

With the growing commitment among Member States, I strongly believe that they are in a better position to address major challenges and obstacles; to strengthen enforcement of tobacco, alcohol and food legislations; to promote diagnostic services for cancer and competency of health workforces to manage cancer; and to provide venues for improving community-based and home-based care for cancer patients.

World Cancer Day is a day of action and reflection. On this occasion, I urge Member States, partners and individuals to strengthen united action in the fight against cancer and promote the health of the population. Together we can make this happen. **We can. I can.**



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Regional Director