I am pleased to present this special issue of the WHO South-East Asia Journal of Public Health on diabetes in the World Health Organization (WHO) South-East Asia Region, to coincide with the 2016 diabetes-themed World Health Day on 7 April 2016. This special issue is published at an important epidemiological juncture, when diabetes is posing a significant public health challenge, both globally and in the WHO South-East Asia Region.

In 2014, out of the 422 million adults living with diabetes worldwide, 96 million persons were from the WHO South-East Asia region. It is a matter of great concern that half of the people affected by diabetes in the region remained undiagnosed and untreated, resulting in serious complications such as retinopathy, kidney disease, stroke, heart attack and premature death.

Type 2 diabetes, which accounts for 90% of all cases, is both preventable and treatable. Promoting healthy lifestyles and early detection must, therefore, be the cornerstone of our strategy to control the epidemic. Messages highlighting the need to maintain a normal body weight, engage in regular physical activity, and eat a healthy diet should be widely disseminated to improve the health literacy of the public. Concurrently, sound public policies that enable healthier lifestyle choices on physical activity and healthy eating should be supported by communities, policy-makers and governments. Priority must be given to strengthening health systems so that these are better equipped to facilitate early detection and provide quality treatment and long-term follow-up for those with the disease. As part of these efforts, community-based research and evaluation of diabetes programmes will be critical to gauge efficacy and further guide policy-makers.

This special issue contains a rich collection of articles, demonstrating the encouraging scientific momentum to address the growing burden of diabetes in the region. I invite policy-makers, health advocates, health professionals and others to read this special issue, and hope all readers find it informative and will be inspired to do their part to prevent and control diabetes in our societies.

Dr Poonam Khetrapal Singh
World Health Organization
Regional Director for South-East Asia