WHO Director-General alerts of devastating health impact of protracted emergencies

Dr Margaret Chan spoke about the health care needs during protracted crises at launch of Global Humanitarian Overview 2016*

WHO Director-General Margaret Chan spoke of the devastating impacts of protracted emergencies on the health outcomes of people at the launch of the Global Humanitarian Overview on 7 December.

The Global Humanitarian Overview 2016 appeals for US$20.1 billion and aims to reach over 87 million people needing humanitarian assistance. Dr Chan stated that people affected by protracted crises are in dire need of essential health care.

“Protracted emergencies displace populations, within countries and beyond their borders, on a massive scale,” said Dr Chan. “They shift populations, either gradually or abruptly, from being self-reliant to largely or entirely dependent on aid organizations. The funding needed to care for basic human needs is record-breaking, as is the funding gap.”

WHO’s operations in countries are unable to deliver services to people in need because of challenges including lack of funding and insecurity. For example, WHO’s Syrian operation estimates that for every US$1 million gap in funding, more than 220,000 people miss out on essential health services.

The Global Humanitarian Overview presents humanitarian appeals for 27 individual countries and six Regional Refugee Response plans. Hundreds of organizations delivering food, shelter, medicine, protection, emergency education and other basic assistance to people in conflict- and disaster-affected regions came together to assess needs and plan the response strategies presented in the 2016 humanitarian appeal.

“Please, do not close your eyes to misery on such a massive scale,” said Dr Chan. “We have a profound moral obligation to take care of these people.”

Watch OCHA Press Conference with Dr Chan

*WHO is part of the Global Humanitarian Consolidated Appeal. Details of WHO’s financial requirements will be published early next year.

Placing health at the heart of the World Humanitarian Summit

The UN Secretary-General will convene the World Humanitarian Summit in Istanbul from 23-24 May 2016. Bringing together Governments, UN agencies, NGOs, private sector, crises-affected people and other humanitarian stakeholders, the Summit aims to set the agenda for humanitarian action for years to come.

Leading up to Istanbul, WHO wishes to ensure that health has a prominent role in the Summit’s deliberations and outcomes. To seek support and political commitment as well to advocate for the importance of health action in crises, WHO will organize a high-level meeting to lobby for a strong WHO and health community role in Istanbul.
Happening in 2016, the WHO meeting will shape concrete messages and commitments for Istanbul. The meeting will be preceded by a brief consultation process of key stakeholders aiming to identify relevant issues and shape the meeting’s agenda. More information will be available soon.

The World Humanitarian Summit is a continuum to a series of high-level events – Sendai Framework, the Sustainable Development Goals and Paris Climate Conference – that have shaped the global development agenda for the future.

Yemen’s health system on the brink of collapse

The intensification of conflict in Yemen since March 2015 has pushed Yemen’s already weakened health system to the brink of collapse. Insecurity, power shortages and a lack of fuel (for generators and ambulances) have led to the closure of almost one in four health facilities. Health workers are among the 2.3 million people displaced, and the procurement and distribution of medicines and medical supplies has been disrupted. Economic factors are also taking a toll on the Ministry of Health’s ability to fund the continued operation of health facilities and individuals’ ability to pay to access them.

As a result, 15.2 million people currently lack access to health care and the conflict looks unlikely to abate any time soon. A one-two punch of successive cyclones has also added to the strain, displacing an extra 44 000 people and increasing the risk of vector-borne diseases such as dengue fever and malaria.

WHO is working to support the Ministry of Health in coordinating the efforts of 22 partner agencies to meet the health needs of people affected by the ongoing conflict. Together, the Health Cluster in Yemen aims to reach 10.3 million of the country’s most vulnerable people with much-needed health assistance.

Current Health Cluster priorities include:

- Providing medical supplies and equipment, including for the treatment of critical cases of non-communicable diseases.
- Vaccinating against diseases including measles, rubella and polio.
- Preventing vector-borne diseases, such as malaria.
- Delivering integrated primary health care, including mental health services.
- Supporting treatment of conflict-related injuries (e.g. through the deployment of surgical teams and supplies).
- Supporting mobile clinics and outreach services for reproductive, maternal and newborn child health.
- Strengthening disease surveillance and outbreak response.

For the past ten months, WHO has been almost the only provider of medicines and medical supplies, distributing 300 tonnes of life-saving goods to the Ministry of Health, UN agencies and NGOs. In addition, WHO has:

- Conducted fumigation campaigns to protect 250 000 people from dengue fever.
- Provided intravenous (IV) fluids to treat 300 000 people.
- Supported 71 health facilities with medicines and medical supplies.
- Delivered 119 000 litres of fuel to maintain uninterrupted health services in hospitals and health facilities, and to support ongoing ambulance services.
- Procured nutritional supplements and paediatric medicines for therapeutic feeding centres.
- Supported improvements to water and sanitation infrastructure at health facilities including the delivery of more than 300 000 water purification tablets between August and October.
- Trained 28 individuals in water testing.

For more information:  
http://www.who.int/hac/yem

Read the full: Update and funding request

Media Centre: WHO: Urgent support needed to provide health services for 15 million people in Yemen

“The funding requested will help WHO and our partners support vital health services in 3 major areas: casualty management for those injured due to the conflict, treatment for patients with chronic diseases, and disease surveillance and vaccination activities to prevent outbreaks,” said Dr Ahmed Shadoul, WHO Representative to Yemen.
Crisis in Ethiopia escalates due to El Niño

Ethiopia needs health support to stop devastation from El Niño

With Ethiopia in the grip of its worst drought in 30 years due to El Niño, WHO deployed an emergency response team to support the Ethiopian Ministry of Health and partners in coordinating the health sector response across the country. Ethiopia has experienced two poor growing seasons in 2015. Due to delayed rains attributed to El Niño, Ethiopia’s main annual harvest saw a severe reduction in output, which has already put more than 8 million people in urgent need of food assistance. Every month since January has seen an increase in the number of Ethiopian malnourished children, with estimates stating that 400,000 children will face severe malnutrition in 2016. In addition, some 1 million expecting and recent mothers are at risk of moderate malnutrition.

Anticipating a major increase in health risks, WHO strengthened its response by mobilizing drugs, equipment and human resources. The situation is expected to worsen over the next eight months and take more than one year for Ethiopia to recover. Vulnerable populations, such as children requiring therapeutic feeding and health care, are particularly at risk of illness and death.

El Niño affects rainfall patterns and temperatures in many parts of the world but most intensely in the tropical regions of Africa, Asia-Pacific, and Latin America which are particularly vulnerable to natural hazards. Typically, some places receive more rain while others receive none causing flooding and droughts causing a variety of public health concerns.

Heavy rainfall at an abnormal time could bring flooding across much of the Horn of Africa, including Ethiopia, which would worsen the humanitarian situation, and makes urgent planning and coordination essential to alleviate the rains’ impact. WHO and partners predict increases in communicable, water and vector borne diseases and medical complications from malnutrition resulting from the El Niño effect. There are also concerns about increasing cases of acute watery diarrhoea.

Disease outbreaks, including dengue fever, acute watery diarrhoea and scabies, are currently ongoing with response already being organized by the Ethiopian Ministry of Health and health partners.

The Ministry of Health is working with partners including MSF Holland, UNICEF, UNHCR, and WHO to put a rapid stop to an outbreak of meningitis C amongst refugees in Gambella, in the west of the country. A request for vaccines from a global interagency stockpile was answered with an agreement to deliver 120,553 doses of vaccine and 750 doses of antibiotics. An emergency vaccination campaign will be launched in the affected refugee camp and surrounding host community.

WHO is working closely with the Ministry of Health and development partners to identify resource needs and ensure life-saving and routine care, while scaling the humanitarian health response.

WHO requires US$ 9.5 million for response to this growing crisis.

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