



Worldwide Hospice Palliative Care Alliance written statement

Regional plan for implementation of Programme budget 2020–2021 in the WHO European Region

Provisional agenda item 5(c)

The Worldwide Hospice Palliative Care Alliance thanks WHO Europe for the opportunity to comment on the implementation of the programme budget 2020-2021. We are concerned that there is no mention of palliative care as an essential part of the health service spectrum within the implementation document. The WHO includes promotion, prevention, treatment, rehabilitation and palliative care in the definition of essential UHC services. Many countries in Europe have led the way in demonstrating how palliative care is a crucial part of the health system and must be integrated into health budgets and implementation plans. However, at all levels, transparent information on budgets for and implementation of palliative care is often absent.

The world is facing a crisis in relation to palliative care access with less than 10% of people being able to access the palliative care that they need. An aging population, multi-morbidity and the increasing incidence of non-communicable diseases is a fact. Yet, it is not being accompanied by an increase in investment or implementation of palliative care services to meet the inevitable need. This is leaving a funding and service gap which can only lead to one thing – the avoidable suffering of millions. Recent research has shown that by 2060, an estimated 48 million people each year (47% of all deaths globally) will die with serious health-related suffering, an 87% increase compared to 2016.

The inclusion of palliative care language as an essential part of Universal Health Coverage and primary health care within key documents such as the Astana and the WHO General Programme of Work is evidence-based and welcome. However, budgets and implementation plans often do not specify the activities and goals towards making palliative care available to all adults and children who need it. There is a high risk that that written words will not turn into action.

As has recently been seen in the UK and other countries across Europe, voluntary and philanthropically funded hospice and palliative care services are struggling to sustain their vital services. The time is now for WHO Europe to take leadership in ensuring that budgets and plans at the global, regional and national level include concrete action towards palliative care services as an essential part of public health systems. This statement is not about pitching one health service against another but calling for integrated healthcare services throughout people's lives, taking a primary health care approach. This must include palliative care. We cannot leave adults and children who are suffering from serious health conditions, including those approaching the end of life, to suffer. This means the inclusion of palliative care in budgets and implementation plans to achieve Universal Health Coverage is a priority.