

WHO Regional Director for Europe visits Kazakhstan, strengthens primary health care collaboration



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During a 3-day visit to Kazakhstan from 28–30 March 2022, Dr Hans Henri P. Kluge, WHO Regional Director for Europe, reaffirmed WHO/Europe’s support to the country in the COVID-19 recovery process and praised Kazakhstan’s efforts in moving the primary health care (PHC) agenda forward.

Speaking at the launch of WHO’s first-ever PHC demonstration platform in Esik, a small town in the Almaty Region, Dr Kluge recognized Kazakhstan’s collaboration with WHO/Europe on primary health care strengthening and innovation, both regionally and globally, through the WHO European Centre for Primary Health Care in Almaty. The PHC platform launch was also attended by Kazakhstan’s Minister of Health, Dr Azhar Giniyat, and a high-level ministerial delegation from neighbouring Uzbekistan.

“Primary health care is the heart of our health systems and essential to our path toward universal health coverage,” said Dr Kluge. “It’s at the primary care level that people first come in contact with health providers, and so it has a key role in improving people’s health and reducing inequalities by emphasizing prevention, early detection and disease management.”

“The strong involvement and engagement between health sector professionals and decision-makers from different countries is what will make demonstration platforms like this so valuable. Kazakhstan has been a global example on how to move from vision to action in strengthening primary health care.”

The demonstration platform launched in Kazakhstan is one of many platforms that will be part of a new WHO/Europe initiative that

showcases well-performing PHC systems in action. Built as a full experience, the platforms consist of 3-to-5-day structured on-site visits by key experts, managers and decision-makers from other countries to PHC facilities to see working examples of good PHC.

During their time at the sites, visitors meet with health workers delivering care, as well as local authorities and decision-makers.

WHO/Europe is planning the opening of additional platforms across the WHO European Region over the next 2 years.

Kazakhstan has historically played a key role in the promotion and strengthening of PHC.

It was in Kazakhstan that the principles and importance of PHC were first outlined at the highest political levels with the 1978 Almaty Declaration, which were then reaffirmed with the Declaration of Astana in 2018.

In 2016, the Government of Kazakhstan and WHO/Europe jointly established the WHO European Centre for Primary Health Care in Almaty – the birthplace of PHC.

Reflecting on this long-standing partnership, Dr Melitta Jakab, Head of the WHO/Europe PHC Centre in Almaty, said, “It is an honour for us to be gathered here today to celebrate the exceptional collaboration between the Kazakh government and WHO/Europe. Our partnership is strong and thriving, filling me with optimism and courage for the future.”

During his visit, the Regional Director had the opportunity to discuss with Minister Giniyat the work of the PHC Centre over the past 2 years, during the COVID-19 pandemic.

“During the pandemic, many countries have realized the true potential of primary care, and as an office, we have consolidated resources and inputs based on technical expertise, country actions and lessons learnt during this unprecedented health crisis,” explained Dr Jakab. “The PHC Centre supports all 53 countries in the European Region and works very closely with 20 countries to provide technical assistance on PHC strengthening.”

Participation and inclusiveness have been essential to the PHC

Centre's work. During the early days of the pandemic, the office initiated a new platform to engage PHC professionals and stakeholders in practical conversations about the future of primary care in the Region.

Named 'Let's Talk Primary Health Care', the talk-show-style events have brought together PHC experts, workers, patients and policy-makers to discuss a wide range of topics related to PHC.

The latest episode on 28 March, on the topic of PHC leadership, featured the participation of both Dr Kluge and Minister Giniyat. The full video is available below.

Dr Kluge also discussed collaboration between WHO Kazakhstan and the Kazakh Ministry of Healthcare (MoH) for the COVID-19 response. In 2020–2021, WHO mobilized US\$9.4 million to support the MoH to deliver a range of activities including training for 6000 health workers, the dissemination of risk communications materials across all 17 Kazakh regions, strengthening laboratories, increasing adherence to WHO COVID-19 treatment protocols, and the delivery of supplies, such as personal protective equipment.

“WHO is grateful to resource partners for their support and cooperation during this challenging time,” said WHO Representative to Kazakhstan, Dr Caroline Clarinval. “We remain committed to strengthening partnerships to further meet the health challenges in Kazakhstan.”

A subsequent meeting was held with resource partners and diplomatic missions active in the country, including Germany, USAID, the EU and Canada, among other partners who have helped in mobilizing over \$10 million to develop a national health policy and strategy and promote WHO initiatives.

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