



Director General *Prof Stanley Okolo*
Message on WAHO Day

9 July 2018

Fellow West Africans,

I bring you greetings from the West African Health Organisation, WAHO, the specialized institution of the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) for health issues.

Today July 9, 2018 marks the 31st anniversary of the creation of WAHO, and it is a unique opportunity to address you on the great strides we have made together in health in our region and the challenges ahead.

The Heads of State and Government of the 15 countries of ECOWAS established WAHO with the singular objective of ensuring “the highest possible standard and protection of health of the people in the region through the harmonisation of policies of the Member States, pooling of resources, and cooperation with one another and with others for a collective and strategic combat against the health problems of the sub-region.”

Since that decision was taken, WAHO has recorded a lot of achievements, despite teething challenges. These include:

- Establishment of the ECOWAS Regional Centre for Surveillance and Disease Control with Headquarters in Abuja, Nigeria
- Training and upskilling of over 1000 health staff as part of capacity building
- Harmonization of Medicines policies across the region
- Improvement in Drugs and Vaccines supply chain security
- Establishment of a network of National Coordinating Institutions for surveillance and emergency response to epidemics
- Establishment of a network of Regional Reference Laboratories
- Publication of a Strategic Document on Public-Private Partnership (PPP) in Health in the ECOWAS region
- Publication of a Traditional Medicine Pharmacopeia (Compendium)

- Regular publication of health information on epidemics
- Regular Forum to share best practices in health in the region
- Development of an Information Database to monitor zoonotic diseases in the context of epidemic diseases using a "One Health" approach. As a result, data on priority animal diseases will be collected in a regional information sharing platform for the ECOWAS region beginning this year.

In June this year in Banjul, the 19th Ordinary Meeting of the Assembly of Health Ministers of ECOWAS adopted several resolutions to advance the health of the citizens of the Community. Some of these include the Regional Strategic Plan for Mental Health in West Africa, the Regulation for Establishing and Defining Operating Procedures of the ECOWAS Regional Biobank and the Common Technical Documents (CTD) for the Registration of Medicines in the ECOWAS Region. The Assembly also accepted the Banjul Declaration by the First Ladies of ECOWAS countries on the Elimination of Obstetric Fistula from the region.

These are great achievements by all standards but we must do more. In the coming years we should ensure our actions and interventions are scaled up for visible population impact, particularly in the thematic areas of Maternal, Child & Adolescent Health, Prevention and Control of Non-Communicable & Communicable Diseases, Access to High Quality Medicines & Vaccines, Promotion of Quality Standards & Centres of Excellence, and Availability of region-specific Health Information.

In all interventions, we will tirelessly work to build human capacity in the region, strengthen our networks and ensure sustainability of all health improvement programs.

This is our bold new vision, which was approved last month by the Assembly of ECOWAS Health Ministers, on the recommendation of the Health Experts Committee of ECOWAS.

On this occasion of WAHO's 31st Birthday, I wish to express our profound gratitude to our Development Partners for their continuous and invaluable financial and technical support towards improving public Health in the ECOWAS Region. Indeed, over the past year, they have been very supportive and we are confident that this collaboration on crucial public health issues will continue.

Finally, my appreciation goes to our Heads of Governments and States in the 15 countries of the ECOWAS region for their commitment to the health of the people. I urge them to continue to strive one and all towards a realization of the April 2001 Abuja Declaration which calls for 15% of all national budgets to be dedicated to health.

Long live WAHO!

Long live Regional Integration Through Better Health!