

UNRWA LAUNCHES PILOT PROJECT TO INTEGRATE MENTAL HEALTH CARE AND PSYCHO-SOCIAL SUPPORT WITHIN ITS PRIMARY HEALTH CARE SERVICES

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The blockade on Gaza, now in its ninth year, and recurrent cycles of armed violence and conflict do not only affect the people of Gaza in physical and socio-economic terms, but also expose the population to high levels of psycho-social stress.

"Approximately one third of the over 1.2 million Palestine refugees who are receiving primary health care services through the 21 UNRWA Health Centres across Gaza show symptoms of mental and social disorders," UNRWA Chief of Health Programme Dr. Ghada Al Jadba said in summarizing the situation.

As part of its continuous efforts to mitigate these dire aspects of life in Gaza and to improve its services, on 31 January the Agency launched a pilot project in Saftawi Health Centre, in North Gaza, to fully integrate mental health care and psycho-social support within its primary health care services.

"The integration of mental health services within its primary health care is a turning point for the Agency, meaning that UNRWA is seeking to provide more comprehensive services to Palestine refugees, especially children and their families, who are approaching our Health Centres," commented Mr. Bo Schack, the Director of UNRWA Operations in Gaza, during his opening speech at the launch event at Saftawi Health Centre, which was attended by community representatives and representatives from the World Health Organization (WHO) together with various senior UNRWA staff members and the Health Centre personnel.

The pilot project is based on the WHO Mental Health Gap Action Programme which aims at providing persons who experience mental health, psycho-social or neurological disorders with appropriate and accessible immediate care. The pilot project recognizes that people's well-being is related to their physical and mental health and thus a holistic care approach, consistent with the UNRWA Family Health Team model, is required.

Prior to the launch of the pilot project, the UNRWA Health Programme, in cooperation with the UNRWA Community Mental Health Programme, in December 2015 initiated training for all Saftawi Health Centre personnel to provide them with specific skills to identify and address psycho-social stress symptoms of patients during their regular work in providing health care for Palestine refugees.

Learnings from the pilot will inform the further rollout as UNRWA plans to implement the integration of mental health services and psycho-social support within its primary health care in all 21 Health Centres across Gaza.

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

UNRWA is confronted with an increased demand for services resulting from a growth in the number of registered Palestine refugees, the extent of their vulnerability and their deepening poverty. UNRWA is funded almost entirely by voluntary contributions and financial support has been outpaced by the growth in needs. As a result, the UNRWA Programme Budget, which supports the delivery of core essential services, operates with a large shortfall, projected for 2016 to stand at US\$ 81 million. UNRWA emergency programmes and key projects, also operating with large shortfalls, are funded through separate funding portals.

UNRWA is a United Nations agency established by the General Assembly in 1949 and mandated to provide assistance and protection to some 5 million registered Palestine refugees. Its mission is to help Palestine refugees in Jordan, Lebanon, Syria, West Bank and the Gaza Strip achieve their full human development potential, pending a just and lasting solution to their plight. UNRWA services encompass education, health care, relief and social services, camp infrastructure and improvement, and microfinance.

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