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# ICA joins global effort to promote universal healthcare

• By JUDY SIEGEL

The Israel Cancer Association has joined an international coalition that includes the World Health Organization to mark for the first time December 12 as "Health For All, Everywhere – Universal Health Coverage Day."

The annual event calls for healthcare, including lifesaving medications, for everyone in the world without having to suffer financially as a result. As the ICA complained on Thursday, "despite Israel's national health insurance system, many patients are unable to purchase highly expensive, lifesaving drugs included in its basket of health services.

The ICA, headed by Miri Ziv, noted that the 1995 National Health Insurance Law, "initiated and brought to legislation by then-health minister Haim Ramon, set down the rights of every Israeli resident for a basket of basic care, but the problems began in 1998, when the parallel tax paid by employers as a contribution to their healthcare was canceled by the Treasury" during Benjamin Netanyahu's first term as prime minister.

Since then, citizens have to pay a growing amount of out-of-pocket fees for their healthcare.

The cost of biological drugs for treating cancer, ICA director Ziv continued, is thousands of shekels a month, and even the well-off can't afford the drugs and medical procedures, some of which are not covered by the basket but can prevent a recurrence in many cases.

In 2007, said Ziv, the cancer association petitioned the High Court to include all life-saving drugs in supplementary health insurance policies sold by public health funds. However, the petition was sabotaged in the Knesset Finance Committee, which reached a limited agreement to bring about "industrial peace" without really solving the problem, the ICA said.

A telephone survey that the ICA just commissioned from Geocartographia surveyed 500 adults on their views on increasing health taxes to include lifesaving drugs in the basket and eliminating the requirement of copayments for drugs (which occurs in many countries with national health insurance).

Sixty percent of the public are willing to pay an additional 1% in health taxes to eliminate copayments for drugs.

According to the ICA, about two billion people are unable to pay for drugs they need or lack access to urgent afford-

able medical care. Even in Israel, there are hundreds of thousands of people entitled by National Health Insurance to healthcare, but they are unable to purchase vital medications because they can't afford the copayments.

Non-communicable diseases including cancer, whose treatment is very expensive, are the focus of the annual day, said the ICA. The publicity is expected to put pressure on national leaders around the globe to implement universal health coverage for all.

"No patient should have to go bankrupt to get basic medical care," said Ziv. Every year, 100 million people enter the ranks of the poverty stricken in an effort to get healthcare, she added. More than 70 countries have taken steps to ensure access to quality healthcare, sparing their citizenry from economic harm to achieve it. Universal care can halt the most significant causes of death in the world, the ICA head said.

The WHO declared in an international convention that getting the best possible standard of care "is a basic human right" and that more than half of the world's nations have already included this right in their national conventions.