



## **AHO President Statement in Support of Africa Sickle Cell Week**

I speak today to recognise Africa Sickle Cell Week, which takes place between June 19 - 26, and which was established by the Africa Health Council in 2018. More than a decade later, I, on behalf of the Africa Health Organisation (AHO), recognise Africa Sickle Cell Week on the same week, June 19-26.

Effective awareness worldwide continues to remain fundamental in eradicating sickle cell disease. Various government organisations, global health agencies, and non-government organisations work tirelessly to aid those with sickle cell. But still, upsettingly, sickle cell is one of the most common genetic diseases in the world. A disease that affects most countries in Africa.

In Africa, the majority of children with the most severe form of the disease die before the age of 5, usually from an infection or severe blood loss. In countries such as Cameroon, Republic of Congo, Gabon, Ghana, and Nigeria the prevalence is between 20% to 30% while in some parts of Uganda it is as high as 45%.

To communicate the importance of preparing for transition to those impacted both directly and indirectly by sickle cell, AHO will specifically:

1. Exert its best efforts to increase awareness regionally and internationally of the burden of this disease on Africa.
2. Leverage its network of partners to promote equitable access to health services.
3. Extend technical support to countries to help ensure prevention and management.
4. Work to support research in an effort to improve quality of life for those affected.

To our region's country governments, I kindly advise collaboration with local sickle cell organisations and engage with patients and their families about the struggles they face daily.

In further support of our incredible sickle cell community, I would like to make an appeal to the public:

1. Where possible, please support the people suffering from sickle cell disease and their families. Take the patients to the nearest health facility for care and treatment.
2. Those who are mothers and have babies aged two-years-old or younger, take them for sickle cell testing to know their status early.
3. For our couples, it is recommended to screen for sickle cell before marriage.

We have come a long way in better understanding the disease; however, there is much more to learn and much more work to be done.

Let today be a day where we celebrate the strides made while we push forward towards eradicating sickle cell disease. Thank you.

**Graciano Masauso, President**

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