GENEVA ¦ 3 April 2013 – To mark World Health Day on 7 April, the World Health Organization (WHO) is calling for intensified efforts to prevent and **control hypertension**, also known as high blood pressure. Worldwide, high blood pressure is estimated to affect more than one in three adults aged 25 and over, or about one billion people.

Hypertension is one of the most important contributors to heart disease and stroke – which together make up the world's number one cause of premature death and disability. Researchers estimate that high blood pressure contributes to nearly 9.4 million deaths from cardiovascular disease each year. It also increases the risk of conditions such as kidney failure and blindness.

Detecting high blood pressure is the first step in preventing and controlling it. On this year's World Health Day, WHO is calling on all adults around the world to get their blood pressure measured. When people know their blood pressure level, they can take steps to control it.

"Our aim today is to make people aware of the need to know their blood pressure, to take high blood pressure seriously, and then to take control," says Dr Margaret Chan, Director-General of WHO.

People can cut the risks of high blood pressure by:

- consuming less salt
- eating a balanced diet
- engaging in regular physical activity
- avoiding tobacco use
- avoiding harmful use of alcohol.

The prevalence of hypertension is highest in Africa (46% of adults) while the lowest prevalence is found in the Americas (35% of adults). Overall, high-income countries have a lower prevalence of hypertension (35% of adults) than low -and -middle income groups (40% of adults) – thanks to successful multisectoral public policies, and better access to health care.

In 2012, at the WHO World Health Assembly, governments decided to adopt a global target of a 25% reduction in premature death from noncommunicable diseases by 2025.

"Global leaders have agreed preventing and controlling high blood pressure is an important step to achieving this target," says Dr Oleg Chestnov, WHO Assistant Director-General for Noncommunicable Diseases and Mental Health. "

WHO's campaign to encourage people to measure their blood pressure is a response to the United Nations Political Declaration on Noncommunicable Diseases, which was adopted by Heads of State and Government in September 2011. The Declaration commits countries to make greater efforts to promote public awareness campaigns to further the prevention and control of noncommunicable diseases such as heart disease and stroke, cancers, diabetes,

and chronic respiratory diseases.

"Early detection of high blood pressure and lowering heart attack and stroke risk is clearly far less expensive for individuals and governments than heart surgery, stroke care, dialysis, and other interventions that may be needed later if high blood pressure is left unchecked and uncontrolled," says Dr Shanthi Mendis, Acting Director of the WHO Department for Management of Noncommunicable Diseases.

WHO supports national efforts to develop high-level policies and plans to prevent and control noncommunicable diseases, as well as programmes related to advocacy, community mobilization, environmental interventions, health system organization and delivery, legislation and regulation.

WHO has guidance for Member States for implementing affordable and effective solutions to reduce health and financial burden linked to hypertension, such as putting in place tools to manage total cardiovascular risk approach in primary health settings.
World Health Day is celebrated on 7 April every year to mark the anniversary of the founding of WHO in 1948. Each year, a theme is selected to highlight a priority area of public health concern in the world.