

## **Webinar: Masculinities and suicide among men in the Americas.**

**21<sup>st</sup> November, 2016**

**PAHO HQ in Washington DC**

### **Concept Note**

The Pan American Health Organization (PAHO) adopted its Gender Equality Policy in 2005 and developed a Strategic Plan of Action 2009-2014 to steer the implementation of the Policy. Member States and the PAHO Secretariat produced a report in 2015 which looked critically at the efforts to achieve gender equality in health programming in the Region. Advances exist in every country, yet true measurement of the gaps in men and women's health conditions and their access to health care throughout the life cycle, requires far more attention and action. One important consensus arising from this review of the continued challenges was that, in order to improve responsiveness to all forms of gender inequalities in health, it is necessary to expand the conceptual framework and modalities to promote and address gender identities, including LGBT and masculinities (amongst others), amongst other foci of attention.

Social constructs of masculinity in different cultural contexts implies for example, that being a man means being tough, brave, risk-taking, aggressive and not caring for one's body or mind. Boys learn what manhood means by observing their families, where many see women and girls providing care giving for children while men are often outside the family setting working. They observe and internalize broader social norms, including messages from television, mass media and from which toys or games are considered appropriate for boys or girls. They also learn such norms in schools and other social institutions and from their peer groups, which may encourage risk-taking behavior, competition and violence and may ridicule boys who do not meet these social expectations. Norms about manhood are constructed against the backdrop of other power hierarchies.

These constructs influence for example, risk taking, differentiated health seeking behavior, compliance with drug therapy and willingness to participate in support groups and networks, are all interconnected variables that influence the health outcomes of boys and men. PAHO recognizes that it is necessary to build further evidence on masculinities and health, in order to target the specific needs for boys and men, girls and women, in the Americas.

One of the particular areas in which evidence shows that men face particularly high risk, and in which constructions of masculinities clearly plays a role, is that of suicide where figures show

high mortality due to suicide among boys and men can be interrupted. In the Americas, about 65,000 deaths occur each year from suicide. Although more women attempt suicide than men, men are unfortunately more successful in their attempts. Accordingly, in the Americas, like elsewhere in the world, male suicide rates remain higher than female rates, accounting for approximately 79% of all deaths from suicide. Unless we address the multiple dimensions of masculinity as they affect health within differing cultural and social contexts of evolving interpersonal relations and gender equality, we will be limited in our ability to confront this issue in order that the boys and men of the Region live healthier and longer lives.

**Objective:** With partners and via live stream, PAHO will raise awareness on masculinities and suicide among men coordinating a webinar for staff and the public with special involvement of two technical departments, the country offices and their partners.