

Wellness Week in the Americas



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Wellness Week in the Americas

Enabling local environments and advocating public policies for healthy living

The Wellness Week is celebrated annually to raise awareness on the importance of enabling local environments to better off conditions for healthy living and improve access to healthy choices in settings where people grow, learn, work and enjoy life.

The Wellness Week has been successful in attracting interest and mobilizing a growing number of countries and health promotion networks across the Americas. The Pan American Health Organization (PAHO) launched the Wellness Week in 2011 in an effort to translate commitments from the UN Political Declaration on Non-Communicable Diseases in the Americas. This initiative built upon the Caribbean Wellness Day, celebrated also in September by the English-speaking Caribbean countries since 2009.

Over time, it has created a space, in the regional public health calendar, to show case real examples of cities providing novel opportunities for healthy living, healthy choices, and social inclusion. The Wellness Week focuses on empowering the civil society to shape health-related policies through participation to gain more control over the determinants of health –in schools and universities, in cities and communities, in the workplace, in health facilities, and other health promoting settings. Initiatives encompass a broad spectrum of possibilities, such as the building of bike paths, organized street dancing and exercises, incentives for restaurants to organize health fairs. In schools, cafeterias offer health foods and restrict access to junk food, while in universities, future professionals are trained to assume responsibility for a healthier generation.

In the process of building *The Future That We Want*, the Wellness Week offers a platform for PAHO to join local and national authorities, civil society organizations, private institutions, and the general public in a massive annual event showcasing living examples of improved access to every day opportunities for healthy leaving. Civil society engagement, participation and collective action during the Wellness Week are key drivers for influencing health-related policies. Supported by new evidence, the Wellness Week comes every year with opportunities to celebrate progress and renewed commitment in promoting health, well-being, and health equity on a massive scale.



Wellness Week

of celebration and results

Every year, a number of events are organized both for advocacy and demonstration purposes. In order to make an annual event such as the Wellness Week successful, it is important to identify some clear policy goals, and develop a core program of engaging activities that could be joined by or added to the ones organized by local and national partners. In addition, the role of social media networks is critical not only to give a well-deserved visibility to initiatives on the ground but also as communication channels for policy advocacy. The bottom line is to deliver large-scale results at the lowest cost possible.

Following are some evaluation results from recent celebrations of the Wellness Week.

Served as a platform for advancing regional public health priorities

A number of themes have been featured in promoting well-being and preventing chronic diseases at Wellness Week events. Important attention has been given to the promotion of healthy eating and physical activity as reflected in the Wellness Week slogan: **Choose Health. Eat Well. Get Moving!** Also, some mutual reinforcement occurred with other recurrent events, such as the Global Handwashing Day, celebrated on October 15th, and the World Health Day, which focused on Hypertension in 2013.

The Wellness Week launching ceremony, in Washington, D.C. was broadcasted through PAHO's life-stream media channels. In coordination with partners, this is the venue where PAHO delivers key messages, as well as the plan of activities for the Region. This central event is followed with a press release for distribution through multiple media outlets.



The Walk for Health celebrated every April, is a classic for the PAHO community, the World Health Day. In 2012, the Walk for Health was first moved to September to become part of the Wellness Week.



Wellness Week

of celebration and results

Many rural and urban communities across the Americas have been eager to engage in physical activities such as walking, exercising, and bike riding (see photo from Guatemala, 2013) during the Wellness Week.



In 2013, the PAHO cafeteria in Washington, D.C. joined the Wellness Week offering a variety of healthy and traditional dishes along with nutrition information to promote healthy choices. More than 300 menu units were served.



After PAHO conducted a life demonstration and distributed a video highlighting the importance of ergonomics at the workplace, staff members from some media outlets reported news on PAHO offices and counterparts at the Ministry of Health conducting "active pause" training for their employees. Over 100 employees at PAHO, Washington, D.C. joined the challenge of using stairs and monitoring the number of steps taken during the week using pedometers.



Wellness Week

of celebration and results

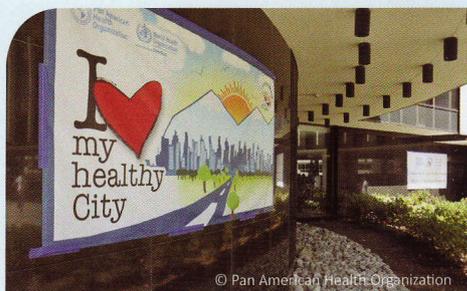
Increasing number of countries celebrating Wellness Week every year

Hundred of municipalities and partner institutions from 12 countries in the Region reported initiatives during the Wellness Week and the Caribbean Wellness Day in 2013, which represented an steady increase over previous years.



Created opportunities for collaboration among institutions committed to social responsibility and sustainable development

Regular Wellness Week partners in recent editions included networks of municipal governments, workplaces, health promoting schools and universities, and national parks. The planning for the Wellness Week frequently became a forum where issues regarding social responsibility had to be addressed involving participation of certain commercial entities.



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Health fairs usually attract large crowds including vulnerable groups. In the Washington, D.C. area, the **Latino Festival** brought over 100,000 people in 2013.

As a side event, the PAHO stand was visited by over 1,200 people who received counseling and educational materials on health related issues. In addition of serving the community, PAHO provided interviews and broadcast messages through national and international media.



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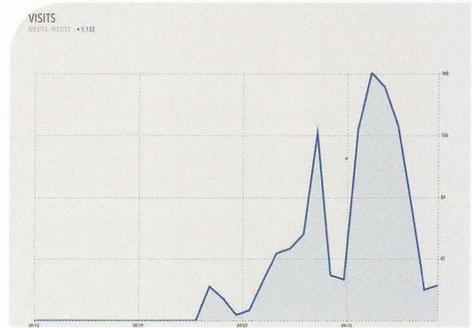
Wellness Week

of celebration and results

Reached millions of people through social media channels

Over 2 million #WellnessWeek impressions on Twitter.

Over 2,400 page views were registered in PAHO's Wellness Week website (see right) from the announcement –that's is three weeks prior to the official launching- through the actual week of celebrations. As a side benefit, visitors have the opportunity to explore related contents and download publications.



Served as a stage to deliver policy statements and shared vision among partners

At the closing ceremony, the Pan American Health Organization (PAHO), the District of Columbia Health Department, the U.S. National Park Service, and the American Public Health Association (APHA) stated their agreement to work together to promote healthy living and healthy settings to improve health, reduce chronic diseases, and enhance quality of life.



Ideas to celebrate Wellness Week and beyond

1. Upgrade existing school feeding programs to serve more fruits, vegetables, and safe drinking water; discourage children from having sugary drinks and snacks rich in salt, sugar and saturated fats.
2. Promote breastfeeding-friendly policies at your work place.
3. Enable spaces in your city for families to safely ride their bikes and encourage them to use helmets.
4. Keep yourself physically active. Walk, exercise, dance, do at least 150 minutes of moderate exercise a week. Have fun and keep moving!
5. Remove salt shakers from the table at home and in restaurants.
6. Choose the stairs over mechanical escalators and elevators on your daily commute.
7. Favor restaurants that display the calorie count on their menus.
8. Support public policies limiting the marketing of unhealthy foods and beverages to children
9. Promote community events free of junk food, alcohol and tobacco sponsors. Make a difference starting at home.
10. Nourish your loved ones with natural and fresh products grown by local farmers rather than processed foods. Choose healthy.
11. Teach children to read the calorie count on food and beverage labels, starting with a can of soda. Choose smart.
12. Replace vending machines selling junk food and sugary drinks with healthier choices at schools and worksites.
13. Support socially responsible companies by keeping your stock market portfolio away from tobacco, alcohol and junk food industries, among others. Choose health.
14. Exposure to second hand smoking also kills and causes illness. Let's get a one hundred percent free of smoke America in public places and worksites.
15. Chronic Noncommunicable Diseases (NCDs) such as diabetes, cancer, and cardiovascular and lung diseases can be prevented. Visit health services to early detect and control your risks.
16. PAHO discourages collaborating with the alcohol industry because there is a conflict of interest with public health. Everybody gains when everyone drinks less.
17. Improve access to healthy food for the most vulnerable groups in your community, including children, pregnant women, elderly and economically disadvantaged individuals.
18. Resist from falling into the bigger portions trap advertised as "get more and save." People can get addicted to food.
19. Selling and promoting alcohol to minors is wrong and should stop. Lead by example.
20. Welcome socially responsible industries and businesses to your city and neighborhood.
21. Minimize the amount of waste you produce at home, work, school, and at large events, like Wellness Week. Consider using composting, reusing and recycling containers to separate your waste instead of sending it to the landfill.
22. Join Wellness Week!



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