

## The Role of the Private Sector in the PAHO Partners Forum for Action against Chronic Disease and Promotion of Healthy Lifestyles

**Co-organized by the Pan American Health Organization and the World Economic Forum**  
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### Summary

The Pan American Health Organization (PAHO) and the World Economic Forum brought together 21 global and regional companies to get their input into the development of the Partners Forum for Action against Chronic Disease and Promotion of Healthy Lifestyles, as the causes of chronic disease lie largely outside the health sector. The concept of the Partners Forum was agreed on as a platform to bring together public and private sectors and civil society stakeholders to take action. The meeting was a major step forward in the co-creation of the Partners Forum, the formal announcement and launch of which will be 29 September and 3 December 2009, respectively. In parallel, five Partners Forum working groups will be formed in the areas of information/communication; healthy diet, especially salt reduction; physical activity, especially *ciclovías*; workplace wellness; and scaling up access to quality health services.

### I. Introduction and Participation



The meeting was opened by Socorro Gross-Galiano, Assistant Director, Pan American Health Organization (PAHO), Washington DC, and Sarita Nayyar, Senior Director, Consumer Industries, and Officer, World Economic Forum USA.

Both stressed the human and economic burden of the chronic disease epidemic, highlighted its preventability – especially through comprehensive, multistakeholder action – and recognized the importance of partnership and working together to tackle the growing problem of chronic disease in the Americas. The meeting was acknowledged as a major step forward in the co-creation of the Partners Forum between PAHO, countries and partners across sectors.

There was a high level of engagement with senior representation across 21 companies of five different sectors (chemicals, communication/public relations, consulting/professional services, food and beverage, and healthcare). Other organizations taking part in the meeting included the Pan American Health and Education Foundation, the International Business Leaders Forum, the Inter-American Development Bank, the Public Health Agency of Canada and McGill University. All of these organizations are directly involved with the Partners Forum development (see Appendix 1 for participants list).

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## II. Concept of the Partners Forum

All participants agreed to the concept of the Partners Forum (see Appendix 2 for presentations) as a platform for dialogue between sectors, raising awareness, and scaling up successful prevention and control practices through cross-sectoral partnership approaches.

**Strategy.** Participants suggested that the work of the Partners Forum be developed in several parallel tracks including short- and longer term strategies. Short-term strategies could focus on engaging already active partners and immediate gains, such as working with the food and beverage and healthcare industries' ongoing initiatives. Long-term strategies should include partners across society, industry and government, and include economic and fiscal arguments on the benefits of change. Participants agreed that a sense of urgency and a sense of long-term commitment are needed.

**Proof of concept:** Concrete goals and targets need to be identified and set; in addition, the demonstration of a proof of concept for partners could be helpful in developing and engaging others in the initiative. The final setting of goals and selection of measures of success need to include public sector, private sector and civil society stakeholders.

**Learning from and leveraging existing initiatives.** The Partners Forum could look into and learn from existing initiatives such as the World Economic Forum's Working Towards Wellness and the World Food Programme's Hunger Platform; the PAHO Trans Fat Free Americas initiative; the IBLF Healthy Eating & Active Living initiative; salt reduction initiatives in North America; regional/national public-private partnership experiences such as in Mexico and Brazil, etc. A preliminary environmental scan of these and other experiences is being prepared and will be shared with participants in the near future.

**Engaging other sectors.** A critical issue highlighted was the need to improve participation from other regional/national industries from sectors already represented at the meeting, as well as other companies not present at all. Participants suggested engaging such industries as financial services, insurance, investment banks (in the capacity of partners, not donors), raw material suppliers, media and entertainment, information technologies and telecommunications, sports and transportation. They also agreed to suggest companies and contacts for this purpose.

**Working groups creation.** Participants noted that there are different realities throughout the region and it is important to agree on common areas of interest to focus efforts in mutually reinforcing directions. While there is one general multistakeholder direction in creating the Partners Forum and its working groups, some coalitions/partnerships will look different depending on the sub-categories, priorities (e.g. school food, tobacco, etc.) and agreed-upon ways of working. There should be flexibility within the structure of the Partners Forum to allow for this factor.

**Cultural diversity.** There is more than one model representing a healthy lifestyle, and there are many differences between countries. It is therefore important to allow for cultural diversity and ensure the Partners Forum frames its evidence-based messages and actions with this in mind. Measurable actions and targets must be identified that consider the differences in what works across countries. This could include understanding on how to localize programmes while building on programmes that already exist in the field.

### III. Partners Forum Working Groups

Five working groups addressed issues of what needs to be done in each area, challenges and opportunities, suggestions on which companies should be involved, measures of success and setting up communication strategies. Participants agreed that these five are not exhaustive of all the working groups that are needed; however, the five working groups cover key areas agreed by all, including previously consulted countries, public health experts and NGOs.

The five working groups formed based on the following subjects:

#### 1. Advocacy, communication and education

A comprehensive information campaign would be too much to take on immediately. There is a need for something tangible that helps people to understand the issue (e.g. messages that resonate and are well timed). Opportunities to share and/or piggyback with education on communicable diseases should be explored, as well as the possibility of creating a partnership of media businesses, as most of the population in the region is reached by a few major companies (e.g. CNN en Español, Univision, Teleglobo, Telemundo, Televisa). Advocacy to senior policy-makers in government and to other sectors was also identified as a critical issue as part of this strategy.

#### 2. Healthy diets, with special focus on salt reduction

Dietary salt reduction is the single most cost-effective measure for reducing chronic disease, especially cardiovascular disease. For healthier products, government should support education and dissemination of information on balanced diets and drive demand for healthier products. Businesses, in turn, could create and market healthier products.

In addition, government could set salt reduction as a priority, help fund research into additives and develop systems for fast track approval, while business could share research on human/consumer behaviour. Participants agreed that an important principle is for “all to move together” – companies, countries and civil society.



To overcome the challenges of lack of communication across government departments and business losing competitive advantage due to lack of alternative ingredients, knowledge of what is already happening in this arena needs to be increased, and large companies should be provided incentives to help/share knowledge with small companies and develop pilot programmes.

PAHO announced that it will establish an Expert Advisory Group on salt reduction to update the science and develop recommendations for the region; the Advisory Group will engage the Partners Forum.

### **3. Physical activity, with special focus on scaling up the Ciclovias initiative**

The direct benefits (especially for schools and workplaces) of preventing/mitigating chronic diseases with low-cost and measurable outputs that are beneficial to physical and psychological health need to be highlighted.

Increasing physical activity can also be seen as a business opportunity. Physical activity needs to be coupled with a balanced diet and “energy balance”. Culturally relevant, existing programmes should be identified, as well as ways to bring them to scale and make them sustainable. Communication is the key: physical activity is easy, not expensive, and accessible to all socio-economic groups. Policies should be developed that promote physical activity as part of individual well-being on the public health agenda. Civil society should be incentivised to play a role in promoting those policies in society.

The PAHO/CDC review of physical activity interventions in the region identified several initiatives as effective, including *Ciclovias*. *Ciclovias*, or “bike paths,” used in Latin America, mean the temporary closure of streets to motorized traffic, which allows the public to engage in physical activity through running, walking, cycling, and more. Participants also highlighted other benefits, including, environment, safety and security.

### **4. Workplace wellness, with special focus on leveraging existing initiatives**

The business case for promoting workplace wellness needs to be made in the Americas region, highlighting how it enhances business benefits, economic sustainability and productivity capacity, and drives competitive advantage.

Existing best practices (in the Americas or elsewhere) should be drawn upon and synthesized. These best practices should be implemented by sequencing (from local to broader) and localization, starting with pilots.

Clear workstreams in the Partners Forum, with defined strategic aims – mobilizing the right stakeholders, managing expectations and identifying other enabling conditions to scale up – would facilitate the success of this workstream.

### **5. Scaling up access to quality health services**

Early detection and screening, sustainable long-term care and the use of new technologies to address chronic disease need to be highlighted and promoted. This is a large issue and encompasses trained providers, drug supplies, patient education, information systems, etc. The evidence shows large reductions in premature deaths and costs when access to treatment is scaled up. Best practices and successes should be used to ensure adequate resourcing, which is currently lacking.

Education and information for the public, including translating science into lay language, should be ensured, as well as making results of initiatives like the Partners Forum visible to the population (proof of concept). This will allow people to make informed choices. In addition, political support for tackling chronic disease (e.g. through commitment from senior national-level leadership) needs to be cultivated.

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## IV. Conclusions and Next Steps

### Engagement in Partners Forum and Next Steps

There was strong willingness from participants to join the Partners Forum workstreams to further some of the work discussed above. Some of the general discussion points on next steps included:

**Engagement of other sectors and parties.** Involving more business and media operations in Latin America and the Caribbean is essential; in addition, universities and research organizations, where the focus is both on prevention and treatment, would be key to the initiative.

**SMEs.** A challenge is how to incorporate small and medium size companies into this dialogue; while they are the major employers, they do not possess the resources to develop sophisticated interventions.

**All target groups.** It is important to be inclusive by engaging all demographics: youth, pregnant women, elderly people, the overweight, etc.

**Incentives and political support.** Workplace wellness is a clear, easy start. In addition to current implementation, identification of incentives could support scaling up. Engaging with insurance companies, for example, could provide an opportunity to explore cost reductions if workplace wellness programmes are in place. Political support (e.g. through statements of high-level political representatives) could encourage further action.

**Capacity building in partnership.** Capacity building at all levels is important to make the ground fertile for building the Partners Forum and fostering a new way of working.

**Measurement.** Identifying indicators that are measured and measurable is still a challenge. Participants suggested identifying and starting with manageable, but credible indicators. The public and private sectors and civil society need to be involved to finalize these indicators.

**Next steps.** If the evidence is there for the economic case, the Partners Forum offers to disseminate it. Identification of other existing information was also identified as key. In addition, the need to drive action immediately was highlighted. There are concerns that the action identified takes a long time to be developed or that what might be chosen is not sufficiently actionable. Further definition of goals and timelines for the workstreams is called for.

### Closing Remarks

The meeting was closed by Sarita Nayyar and Mirta Roses Periago, Regional Director, The Americas, Pan American Health Organization (PAHO), Washington DC, who committed to building up PAHO as a stronger partnering organization and indicated that the formal announcement of the Partners Forum would be made on 29 September 2009. In addition, the official launch and first meeting will take place on 3 December 2009.

The majority of participants indicated a strong interest in being part of the Partners Forum, and called for immediate action and next steps to be taken forward.