

Wellness Week 2017

Concept Note



Let's talk about our well-being!

The Pan American Health Organization (PAHO/WHO) Wellness Week is a corporate initiative dedicated to promoting health and well-being across the Region of the Americas. Wellness Week was originally launched in 2011 in an effort to translate commitments from the UN Political Declaration on Noncommunicable Diseases (NCDs) in the Americas.¹ The aim was to mobilize stakeholders in raising attention to NCDs and the societal action needed to prevent and control them.¹ This initiative built upon Caribbean Wellness Day (CWD) and it has since expanded its focus and reach, and now embraces health and well-being broadly through an annual celebration across the Americas. Local, national, regional, and international stakeholders work together to build a social movement for healthy living, healthy settings, and healthy policy. In this way, Wellness Week serves as a platform for advancing public health priorities and empowering local authorities, civil society organizations, the private sector, media, community organizations, and the public to shape health promoting practices, programs, places, and policies.

Wellness Week 2017 will be celebrated from 9-15 September 2017 across the Americas, with the launch coinciding with CWD on 9 September. Under the slogan “Let’s talk about our well-being”, the theme for 2017 is promoting mental well-being where we learn, work, play, and love. As in previous years, Wellness Week aligns with and reinforces key messages from World Health Day, which in 2017 is “Depression: let’s talk”.³ The theme of mental well-being aligns with the PAHO/WHO understanding of mental health as a state in which individuals can realize their own abilities, cope with the normal stresses of life, work productively and fruitfully, and make a contribution to their communities.⁴ Promoting mental well-being is important and timely as mental disorders are increasing worldwide.³ In the Region of the Americas, 1 in 4 people experiences mental illness and/or substance use disorder in their lifetime.⁴ Mental illness also increases the risk for other communicable and noncommunicable diseases, and contributes to unintentional and intentional injury.⁴ The lack of support for people with mental disorders, coupled with a fear of stigma, prevent many from accessing the treatment they need to live healthy, productive lives.²

PAHO/WHO will lead the Wellness Week 2017 initiative at the headquarters in Washington D.C., and provide support to country offices and partners across the Americas. All regions are

encouraged to promote mental well-being where we learn, work, play, and love by incorporating one or more of the following topics in activities throughout the week:

- *Promoting inclusion & diversity to reduce stigma* - Addressing issues around prejudice and discrimination to reduce stigma associated with mental illness is an important first step in creating healthy, supportive, and safe environments for all.
- *Building coping skills to manage stress* - Understanding the causes of personal stress and building coping skills are important tools to manage and reduce stress, both at home and at work. Balancing work/life demands and creating a positive work environment are also key strategies to foster well-being at the workplace.
- *Healthy living for mental well-being* - There is no health without mental health.⁴ Raising awareness of how mental and physical health are linked, building health literacy, and promoting healthy lifestyles for healthy aging are all important factors for mental well-being, as the population of the Region of the Americas continues aging.⁶ Healthy lifestyles, which include physical activity and healthy eating, also align with the 10th anniversary of the Port of Spain Declaration - NCDs Agenda.²

PAHO/WHO recognizes to support people in realizing their full potential, we need to promote mental well-being, prevent mental disorders, expand services to those in need, and promote the human rights of persons with mental disorders.^{4,5} As such, we invite local, national and regional institutions to celebrate Wellness Week 2017 and engage in conversations about mental well-being, plan culturally appropriate health-related activities, and showcase local initiatives that promote and support mental well-being for everyone. We all have a role in mental health promotion; awareness and active involvement by each member of the community often have the greatest impact in making positive improvements in people's mental well-being.⁵

For more information and to join in the celebration, we invite you to register your activities and share pictures on www.paho.org/wellnessweek

Thank you.

References

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