



Organización  
Panamericana  
de la Salud



Organización  
Mundial de la Salud

OFICINA REGIONAL PARA LAS Américas

## **56th DIRECTING COUNCIL**

***70th SESSION OF THE WHO Regional Committee FOR THE AMERICAS***

*Washington, D.C., USA, 23-27 September 2018*

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**OPENING REMARKS BY DR. SOUMYA SWAMINATHAN  
DEPUTY DIRECTOR-GENERAL FOR PROGRAMMES OF  
THE WORLD HEALTH ORGANIZATION**

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**23 September 2018  
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**56th Directing Council of PAHO  
70th session of the WHO Regional Committee for the Americas**

Excellencies, honourable delegates,  
Dr. Carissa Etienne, Regional Director for the Americas,  
Colleagues and friends,

Dr. Tedros, Director-General, sends his apologies for being unable to attend the Directing Council meeting today as he is in New York at the UN General Assembly.

For the past year, under Dr. Tedros' leadership, we have been laying the foundations for the future. At the World Health Assembly in May, you and all the Member States approved the General Programme of Work—our five-year strategic plan with ambitious targets:

- 1 billion more people benefitting from universal health coverage;
- 1 billion more people better protected from health emergencies; and
- 1 billion more people enjoying better health and well-being.

We all must work together if we are to stay on track. For this plan to succeed, we must make sure we have the right resources. That's why we have developed WHO's first ever investment case. It's why we have built a strong leadership team, to make sure we have the people to succeed. And it's why we have begun a transformation project, to ensure we have the structures and processes to succeed.

Now we embark on the task of turning our plan into a reality. This is a task for all of us—the Member States, the Secretariat, donors, partners, civil society, academia and the private sector.

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There are many encouraging signs of progress in the Region of the Americas towards the “triple billion” targets and the Sustainable Development Goals. Progress towards universal health coverage in this Region is critical to reaching the first of the “triple billion” targets.

Globally, almost 100 million people are pushed into extreme poverty by the costs of paying for care out of their own pockets. I commend you for your work to expand access and improve quality of care in the Americas using a primary health care approach.

Access to antiretroviral therapy and new vaccines increased significantly in this Region in the past two years. For example, 35 of the Region’s 52 countries and territories (more than two thirds) now include the HPV vaccine in their routine immunization schedules. More than half of people with HIV are receiving antiretroviral therapy in Latin America and the Caribbean.

The Mais Medicos program in Brazil has extended access to care to 60 million additional people.

Increased availability of cataract surgery has cut the prevalence of visual impairment in the Region to 2.78% in all ages and 10.37% in people over 50 years of age.

The resolution for discussion this week on human resources for universal access to health aims to expand access to quality health care for everyone, no matter where they live.

The resolution on the Plan of Action for Cervical Cancer Prevention and Control will help to ensure that more women have access to the HPV vaccination and to screening and treatment for this disease that is the leading cause of cancer deaths among women in 11 countries in the Americas.

I should recognize the hard work done in this Region towards the second “triple billion” target to protect people better from health emergencies. An unprecedented number of natural disasters and disease outbreaks affected countries of the Americas during 2016-2017. And yet, despite this strain on resources, you managed to respond effectively to all emergencies with potential health impacts in 33 countries and several territories within 72 hours of onset.

During the past two years, WHO also certified Emergency Medical Teams in Costa Rica and Ecuador. We encourage all countries to develop their own national emergency medical teams, as required under the International Health Regulations, to respond to their own health threats.

WHO can help by strengthening the capacity of your teams to deploy to other countries in the Region when your neighbours need you, and also to come and help us fight outbreaks and relieve suffering in emergencies and disasters across the world. While outbreaks and other health emergencies capture global headlines, individuals and families face their own emergencies or crises every single day.

That is the focus of the third “triple billion” target - to improve the health and wellbeing of the people of the Americas.

Your Region has made significant gains in areas including healthy life expectancy, improved child survival, reduction in deaths from dengue, and road traffic injuries, and elimination of onchocerciasis and other communicable diseases.

You have also made encouraging progress in saving more mothers’ lives, with a reduction of the regional maternal mortality ratio by more than 10% projected for 2019. Since your flagship “Zero Maternal Deaths from Hemorrhage” initiative was introduced, 4 countries (Bolivia, the Dominican Republic, Guatemala and Peru) where the interventions took place have had zero deaths from maternal deaths due to hemorrhage.

You have also made progress in improving child and adolescent health. The percentage of children less than 5 years of age who are stunted dropped to 6.3% in the Region, exceeding the 2019 target of 7.5%.

Notable achievements in disease elimination include:

- WHO certified six additional countries and territories for elimination of mother-to-child transmission of HIV and congenital syphilis. Cuba was also recertified for another two years.
- The Region also declared the elimination of maternal and neonatal tetanus in Haiti, thus completing elimination throughout the Americas.
- In 2016, WHO verified the elimination of onchocerciasis in Guatemala, and in 2017 Mexico received validation of the elimination of trachoma as a public health problem.
- In June 2018, WHO certified Panama as having eliminated malaria, the first country in the Americas to be granted this status since Cuba in 1973.

The Plan of Action on Entomology and Vector Control, up for discussion this week, is crucial to supporting the elimination of vector-borne diseases in this region.

All of this work and these successes from your Region make an enormous contribution to improving the health and wellbeing of the world's people.

But we know that none of us can achieve anything on our own. To achieve the SDGs, we need innovative and dynamic partnerships—partnerships with a purpose.

We congratulate you, the Region's health workers, for adopting your own Sustainable Health Agenda for the Americas 2030, which provides vision and direction for achieving SDG3 by addressing the specific health challenges facing your countries and your region.

As you know, earlier this year President Akufo-Addo of Ghana, Chancellor Merkel of Germany and Prime Minister Solberg of Norway wrote to WHO, asking us to develop a Global Action Plan on health and well-being.

They recognize that achieving SDG 3 is within reach, but will only happen if we all work together to leverage our collective strength. That is why it is essential that we work together as one global health community.

In the coming weeks and months, you will be hearing more about how WHO is transforming to put countries at the centre of everything we do.

The clearest example is our Programme Budget for 2020 and 2021.

The budget has been developed based on country priorities. Its focus is on strengthening the capacity of our country offices to deliver impact.

As you have heard, we are proposing an almost 30% increase in technical capacity for country offices, while the headquarters budget will stay flat.

WHO's transformation is linked closely with the wider UN reforms.

Both the GPW and the new UN Resident Coordinator system will take effect as of the 1st of January next year.

This is a great opportunity for us to become more effective—to deliver as one. One UN, with a whole-of-government approach, and a commitment to deliver the SDGs.

We must all break out of our silos and work together with colleagues from across government and across the UN family.

That is exactly what the Sustainable Development Goals demand of us.

By working to achieve the ambitious targets of the GPW, along with those of the SDG 3, we will not only achieve better health and well-being for billions of people, we will help drive progress towards all of the SDGs.

That's why the best investments are not in infrastructure but in human capital—in people.

Universal health coverage helps lift people out of poverty by eliminating one of its causes. It is essential to enable individuals, families, communities and entire nations and continents to flourish.

With good health, anything is possible.

It's why WHO is here, working every day to promote health, keep the world safe and serve the vulnerable.

Thank you.

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