

Bulletin of the Mental Health and Specialized Programs Unit



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The Mental Health and Specialized Programs Unit of the Pan American Health Organization (PAHO) /World Health Organization (WHO) is pleased to send you the first issue of its bulletin. The object of this publication is to communicate important advances, news, and information on publications in the fields of mental health, the control of alcohol and substance abuse, rehabilitation, and the international protection of human rights in this context.

The main objectives of this unit are to strengthen the countries' capacity to develop mental health policies, plans, programs, and services; formulate public policies for the control of excessive alcohol consumption; prevent disabilities and achieve equal opportunities for people with disabilities; and promote and protect the human rights and fundamental liberties of people with disabilities and their families.

Principles of Brasilia on Mental Health

From 7 to 9 November 2005, PAHO and WHO, with support from the Government of Brazil, held a Regional Conference on Mental Health Service Reform in Brasilia as part of the celebrations marking the 15th anniversary of the Caracas Declaration in order to assess the progress made since 1990. This conference brought together more than 100 participants from governments, civil society organizations, users and their families.

One achievement of the conference was the drafting of the "Principles of Brasilia," which lay down specific guidelines for continuing to work towards the implementation of the ethical, legal, technical, and political principles enshrined in the Caracas Declaration. The pdf version of the Principles of Brasilia can be accessed at: http://www.paho.org/Spanish/DD/PIN/principles_of_Brasilia.pdf

Decision of the Supreme Court of Argentina on the Human Rights of People with Mental Disabilities in Conformance with International Human Rights Law

The Supreme Court of Argentina recently issued an important decision interpreting the right to personal liberty of people with mental illness as stated in article 8 of the American Convention on Human Rights. Adhering to the norms of the Convention, the Court referred to the legal guarantees afforded to all institutionalized persons. This right is also interpreted by the Supreme Court in light of the United Nations Principles for the Protection of Persons with Mental Illness and the standards set by the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights (IACHR) with respect to mental health and human rights. The decision also calls for the periodic review of psychiatric commitments in conformance with the guidelines developed by the jurisprudence of the European Human Rights Court. The pdf version of the decision can be accessed at: http://www.paho.org/Spanish/DD/PIN/Fallo_Corte_Suprema_Argentina.pdf

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Brasilia Declaration on Alcohol Public Policies

Patterns of irregular, excessive alcohol consumption, generally among people who are not alcohol dependents, result in traffic accidents, homicides, domestic violence, falls, and other injuries. Youth and indigenous populations are the most affected groups. With the object of presenting and discussing this situation, epidemiological factors, and public policies regarding excessive alcohol consumption, in a joint effort with the Government of Brazil, PAHO organized the 1st Pan American Conference on Alcohol Public Policies, held in Brasilia from 28 to 30 November 2005. More than 110 participants from 27 countries in the Region attended. The Word version of the Declaration can be accessed at <http://www.paho.org/English/DD/PIN/pr051128.htm>

Pan American Journal of Public Health Issue on Mental Health and Alcohol and Substance Abuse

The entire October/November 2005 issue of the *Pan American Journal of Public Health* is devoted to mental health as a public health priority. It contains 15 articles on mental health issues such as depression and schizophrenia, the human rights of persons with mental disabilities, alcohol consumption, and the reform of mental health services. This issue can be accessed at http://publications.paho.org/spanish/backissues/backissues.cfm?Product_ID=821#1e

PAHO and WHO Participation in the Discussions and Drafting of an International Convention on the Protection and Promotion of the Rights and Dignity of Persons with Disabilities (23 January 2006)

PAHO and WHO presented their contributions to the United Nations on the draft of the above-mentioned Convention on the right of persons with disabilities to the highest attainable standard of physical and mental health. These presentations were part of the meetings that the United Nations Ad Hoc Committee is holding for the drafting of a

new treaty on human rights and disability. This Committee is comprised of the United Nations' Member States, organizations of persons with disabilities, and the UN specialized agencies, among others.

PAHO and WHO presented their written and oral contributions on the protection of the right to health and other human rights of persons with disabilities in the context of experimentation, informed consent, the training of public health personnel, the restriction of rights, and the right to privacy within the context of rehabilitation, health services, and advances in technology. The Word version of these contributions can also be accessed at:

<http://www.un.org/esa/socdev/enable/rights/ahc7contunagencies.htm>

Brief Notices about the Unit Team...

With the return of the Unit Chief, Dr. José Miguel Caldas de Almeida, to his home country, we would like to announce that Dr. José Luis Di Fabio will serve as Interim Unit Chief, and Dr. Itzhak Levav (levavitz@paho.org) will temporarily be providing technical support to the Program on Mental Health. We wish José Miguel all success in his new functions in Portugal.

The vacancy announcement and information on the post of Unit Chief, Mental Health and Rehabilitation (PAHO) can be found at: https://erecruit.who.int/e-jobs/public/hrd-cl-vac-view.cfm?o_c=1000&intra=1&jobinfo_uid_c=4964&vacng=en

Information on the WHO Department of Mental Health and Substance Abuse (Geneva) can be accessed at: www.who.int/mental_health/en/