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REPORT OF THE COMMISSION ON EQUITY AND HEALTH INEQUALITIES IN THE AMERICAS

Background

1. While there has been notable improvement in the health of peoples in the Americas in recent years, significant inequalities still persist. These improvements are not consistent across countries or between social groups, especially those living in situations of vulnerability, whose well-being and health continue to be adversely affected. Mindful of this situation, in 2016 the Director of the Pan American Sanitary Bureau (PASB, or the Bureau) established the Commission on Equity and Health Inequalities in the Americas (the Commission) and entrusted it with promoting actions to reduce inequities and inequalities throughout the Region of the Americas.¹ This initiative is the first large-scale effort to gather evidence on health inequities and inequalities in the Region.

2. The PAHO Strategic Plan 2014-2019 highlights four cross-cutting themes—gender, equity, human rights, and ethnicity—which are applied across all categories and program areas of the Organization’s work to improve health outcomes and reduce inequities in health (*1*). The Commission is composed of 12 experts from countries in the Region of the Americas,² each specialized in one or more of the four cross-cutting themes. The commissioners are currently evaluating evidence on the causes of inequalities in the Region and developing proposed actions that can improve health and well-being for everyone.

¹ The PAHO Commission on Equity and Health Inequalities in the Americas has partnered with 15 countries across the Region: Argentina, Belize, Brazil, Canada, Chile, Colombia, Costa Rica, Cuba, El Salvador, Jamaica, Mexico, Peru, Suriname, Trinidad and Tobago, and United States of America.

² PAHO has appointed 12 commissioners from different fields who are recognized for their work on equity, gender, ethnicity, and human rights. The Commission is chaired by Sir Michael Marmot, Director of the Institute of Health and Equity at University College London (UCL/IHE), and co-chaired by Nila Heredia (Bolivia) and María Paula Romo (Ecuador). The other commissioners, in alphabetical order, are Víctor Abramovich (Argentina), Mabel Bianco (Argentina), Cindy Blackstock (Canada), Jo Ivey Boufford (United States of America), Paulo Buss (Brazil), Pastor Murillo (Colombia), Tracy Robinson (Jamaica), David Satcher (United States of America), and Cesar Victora (Brazil).

3. This information document summarizes the accomplishments of the Commission to date, with emphasis on the progress achieved and the work remaining.

Analysis of Progress Achieved

4. The Commission is conducting 11 evidence reviews on thematic areas covering a wide range of social and biological factors that impact on equity and equality in health. The specific topics of the evidence reviews are varied and comprehensive, including: *a*) intergenerational transmission, early years, young people, and education; *b*) working life; *c*) healthy aging; *d*) gender, sexuality, and gender identity; *e*) race and ethnicity; and *f*) disabilities. A second area of attention concerns the socioeconomic and political context. From this perspective, the Commission is analyzing variables pertaining to *g*) macroeconomic and environmental policy, and *h*) governance. In addition, the evidence reviews also study pathways to health, including: *i*) material circumstances; *j*) social cohesion, resilience, and cultural and societal norms and values; and *k*) health care, public health services, and priority public health conditions.

5. To accomplish its objective, the Commission is building strong country partnerships to identify the work that countries are currently doing to improve health equity, thus creating a record of positive and innovative practices and case studies. These country partnerships also provide the Commission with the opportunity to obtain qualitative and quantitative data on gender, equity, human rights, and ethnicity that help to identify and overcome barriers.

6. In 2016, the Commission held two initial meetings in Washington, D.C., to finalize its core objectives. It then held four more meetings, each with one of the cross-cutting themes as the main agenda item while also addressing the three remaining themes. In 2017, the Commission met in Colombia, where it discussed ethnicity and its impacts on health, and Costa Rica, where it focused on issues pertaining to gender and violence. In 2018, the Commission met in Trinidad and Tobago to address human rights in health and, most recently, in the United States of America (Atlanta, Georgia), under the auspices of the Morehouse School of Medicine, to discuss issues related to civil rights and minority populations in Canada and the United States, including Afro-descendants, Latino-Americans, and indigenous populations. A final meeting will be convened at PAHO Headquarters in June 2018 to review a set of draft recommendations.

7. The Commission's meetings have been held in different countries to ensure geographic representation. The diversity of venues has provided the commissioners with invaluable opportunities to receive input from civil society, government, academia, and other sectors, thus impacting on the pertinence and quality of the report and recommendations to be presented in the second half of 2018.

Executive Summary of Recommendations and Final Report

8. The Commission will prepare an executive summary of its report to be presented to the Directing Council in September 2018. This document will present the main recommendations and include specific and actionable policy interventions.

9. The final report of the Commission, including the results of the 11 evidence reviews and a list of action-oriented recommendations, will be completed later in 2018. It is anticipated that the report will provide new ways of understanding and prioritizing equity and equality in health. The report will also present evidence and data to serve as a basis for monitoring, evaluating, and reducing inequities and inequalities in the Region of the Americas.

10. The Commission's final report and recommendations will become a tool to support Member States as they monitor and evaluate health inequalities, taking into account the mandates contained in the following resolutions of the PAHO Governing Bodies: Plan of Action on Health in All Policies (Resolution CD53.R2 [2014]) (2), Health and Human Rights (Resolution CD50.R8 [2010]) (3), and Policy on Ethnicity and Health (Resolution CSP29.R3 [2017]) (4), among others.

Action by the Executive Committee

11. The Executive Committee is invited to take note of this report and to provide any comments it deems pertinent.

References

1. Pan American Health Organization. Strategic Plan of the Pan American Health Organization 2014-2019 [Internet]. 53rd Directing Council of PAHO, 66th Session of the Regional Committee of WHO for the Americas; 2013 Sep 30-Oct 4; Washington, DC. Washington, DC: PAHO; 2014 (Official Document 345) [cited 2018 Mar 1]. Available from: http://www.paho.org/hq/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=9774&Itemid=41062&lang=en
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4. Pan American Health Organization. Policy on ethnicity and health [Internet]. 29th Pan American Sanitary Conference, 69th Session of the Regional Committee of WHO for the Americas; 2017 Sep 25-29; Washington, DC. Washington, DC: PAHO; 2017 (Resolution CSP29.R3) [cited 2018 Mar 1]. Available from: http://www.paho.org/hq/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=13497&Itemid=2105&lang=en
