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REPORT OF THE ADVISORY COMMITTEE ON RESEARCH FOR HEALTH

Introduction

1. This document summarizes the deliberations and recommendations of the 46th Session of the Advisory Committee on Health Research (ACHR) of the Pan American Health Organization/World Health Organization (PAHO/WHO), held in Washington, D.C., on 28-30 November 2016. The full report is available at the ACHR website: www.paho.org/achr/46.
2. Research is essential to improving health and equity effectively and efficiently. It is also a crucial resource for avoiding waste and preventable harm. Research is a core function of PAHO/WHO and an integral component of PAHO/WHO program of work.
3. Research is needed by countries to achieve and maintain the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), the Sustainable Health Agenda for the Americas 2018-2030, and to advance towards universal access to health.

Background

4. The Americas became the first WHO region to establish a policy on research for health, and the policy is in alignment with the WHO Strategy on Research for Health (1, 2). Since 2009, the ACHR has advised PAHO on the implementation and advancement of its Policy on Research for Health (3-7).
 5. Information about the Committee's membership, its reports, historical contributions, and background documentation, including a collection of short videos, can be found on the ACHR website. The Secretary and Chair of the ACHR also participate in coordination and harmonization meetings with other regional ACHRs, with the global WHO ACHR and at relevant high-level meetings (3, 8-10).
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6. The 46th Session of the ACHR focused on advancing the implementation of the Policy on Research for Health. One of its main objectives was to facilitate a meaningful dialogue on research for health in the Region.

7. The specific objectives of the 46th ACHR meeting were to:

- a) Take stock of the contributions and tools developed by the ACHR and PAHO;
- b) Emphasize the role of the ACHR and its members in advocating for the Policy on Research for Health;
- c) Coordinate efforts with other regions and stakeholders to develop a systematic approach, increase the value of research, and use research to strengthen health systems;
- d) Exchange feedback to identify new challenges in public health and discuss strategic approaches to building on research aimed at achieving and maintaining the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), established in the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development;
- e) Think strategically about challenges for the next generation of research teams.

8. At the meeting, each of the six objectives of the PAHO Policy on Research for Health was discussed and information sessions were held on selected topics. Technical units in the PASB participated by providing information during the preparatory phase and at the meeting itself on such subjects as the social determinants of health, equity, the SDGs, the Pan American Sanitary Bureau (PASB) performance monitoring and assessment (PMA) system, human resources for health, research ethics, PAHO scientific publications and information services, etc.

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9. ACHR members commended PAHO for its continued progress in all key domains covered by the PAHO Policy on Research for Health, for its ongoing work with strategic partners, and for documenting progress in reports and publications. The ACHR stressed that going forward it will be necessary to continue taking stock and to use these milestones as benchmarks. It noted that scientific research will provide Member States and PASB with strategic and effective tools for responding to new challenges, such as supporting the SDGs.

10. The ACHR heard progress reports on a number of specific initiatives, including the PAHO Ethics Review Committee; the International Clinical Trial Registry Platform; the WHO Global Observatory on Health Research and Development; capacity-building and the development of human capital in research for health geared toward strengthening health systems; progress toward the achievement of indicators and assessments of the PAHO Policy on Research for Health; support extended to countries for the development of

national policies and agendas on research for health; integration of research for health into PASB technical programs; and preparations to build on research to support Agenda 2030.

Recommendations

11. The Committee's general recommendations call for steps to ensure that the PAHO Policy on Research for Health achieves its desired impact and that this impact is measured. Accordingly, with support from the ACHR, PASB should continue to work on integrating the indicators for assessing achievement of the policy's objectives using the PMA and complementing it with other assessments.

12. PASB should continue to promote the development of mechanisms to collect and share reliable and current regional and national data and knowledge about health research systems to support Member States and strategic partners. The data and knowledge should cover, inter alia, the capacities and outputs resulting from investing in research for health; the use of data and knowledge to adapt to the evolving landscape of health and health systems; and the place of research for health in society, government, and development. Member States and PASB should offer standardized organized real-time actionable data (dashboards/consoles) to enable better governance and decision-making, and they should also provide enhanced monitoring and management of national and regional capacities and outputs in research for health.

13. PASB is urged to continue supporting national health authorities, local research institutions, and other stakeholders in promoting research for health in accordance with national priorities and needs for research evidence. This support will help to ensure that health policies and practices are rooted in timely, rigorous, and relevant research that is based on knowledge of the local context.

14. PASB is encouraged to promote and facilitate collaboration among Member States and actively support them in strengthening their governance and stewardship of research for health, adopting good practices and standards, and implementing performance assessment tools.

15. Emphasis should be placed on developing research teams and networks with skills in multiple sectors and fields of knowledge in order to address demands and take advantage of opportunities to improve health with equity.

16. Furthermore, there should be emphasis on addressing the gaps between countries in capacity to benefit from research, so that they can all take advantage of research for health and development and the strengthening of health systems.

17. In addition, PASB should promote full use of every research component, including the incorporation of social sciences and diverse methodologies such as mixed methods, approaches, and disciplines. Data collection and analysis should consider the entire cycle of the research process, from discovery to assessment to scaling up of interventions.

In general, behavioral changes, health systems research, and other aspects of research for health should be integrated.

18. The ACHR made the following specific recommendations:
 - a) Reactivate the WHO Evidence-informed Policy Network (EVIPNet) in the Region;
 - b) Promote partnerships between countries;
 - c) Advance capacity-building with local research teams and regional networks to create efficiencies and facilitate collaboration and support across the subregions;
 - d) Change the name of the ACHR to “Advisory Committee on Research for Health” to reflect the current more comprehensive and inclusive paradigm (10, 11);
 - e) Disseminate and advocate for the Policy on Research for Health and related policies (e.g., the WHO Health Systems Research Strategy and the WHO Global Strategy and Plan of Action on Public Health, Innovation, and Intellectual Property) among broader and more varied audiences using a variety of media and strategies and promote its adoption;
 - f) Highlight the added value of research for health; mobilize experts and managers to reduce research waste; increase the value and appreciation of research for health.

Action by the Executive Committee

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

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