



# Strategy for Universal Access to Health and Universal Health Coverage

**Toward consensus  
in the Region of the Americas**



Pan American  
Health  
Organization



World Health  
Organization  

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REGIONAL OFFICE FOR THE Americas

## **Toward consensus in the Region of the Americas**

In the Region of the Americas, millions of people lack access to comprehensive health services required to live a healthy life and to prevent disease, as well as, to receive the health services they need when they are sick, including palliative care in the terminal phase of diseases<sup>3e</sup>. This Region remains one of the most inequitable in the world. Ensuring that all people and communities have access to the comprehensive health services they need is a fundamental challenge for the Pan American Health Organization and is the purpose of this strategy.

The countries of the Region reaffirmed their commitment to universal health coverage at the 52nd PAHO Directing Council (2013) by giving the Pan American Sanitary Bureau the mandate to prepare a strategy to be presented to the 53rd Directing Council (2014). This commitment by Member States is expressed in the PAHO Strategic Plan 2014-2019, which recognizes universal health coverage as a key pillar, together with the social determinants of health.

The Pan American Sanitary Bureau supported a consultative process for developing the strategy for

universal health coverage in order to promote a broad-based participatory dialogue on the issue and to identify not only problems and obstacles but innovative approaches and solutions that will allow the Region to advance toward universal coverage.

Thirty-one consultations in an equal number of countries were held, with some 1,300 participants. This process yielded a series of contributions that have enriched the strategy document and reveal the needs of the countries.

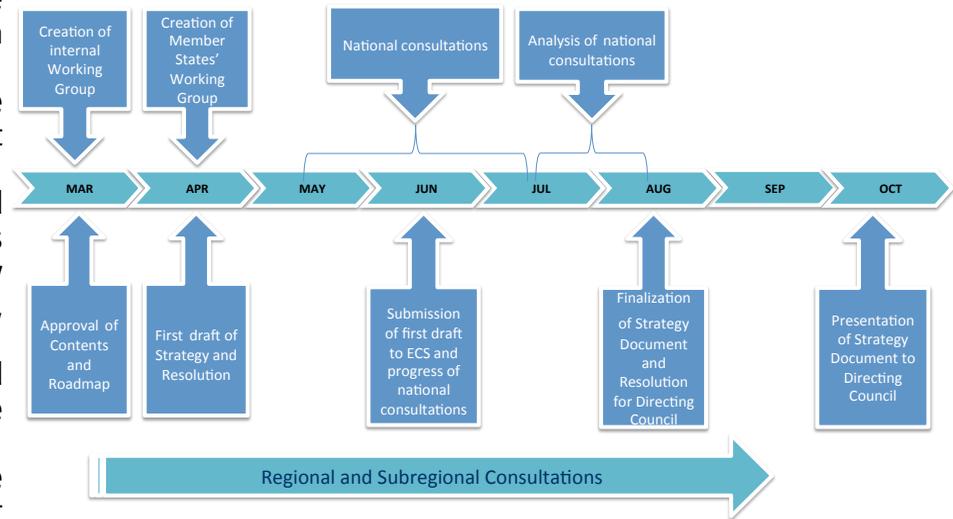


**Dr. Carissa F. Etienne**  
Director of PAHO

# The consultative process contributed to the following:

- A broad dialogue that ensured that the voice of Member States were reflected in the strategy document.
- A series of contributions that have enriched the strategy document and reflect the needs of the countries.
- Demonstration of the commitment and enthusiasm of the national authorities and PAHO Country Offices, which actively participated in the call for contributions, drafting, and editing of the document.
- Transparent discussion of the issues and consultative process by means of active social networks throughout the Region.
- The generation of information that can be used by Member States in the development of action plans to advance toward universal access to health and universal health coverage.

## Dialogue and consensus timeline



**U**niversal access to health and universal health coverage imply that all people and communities have access, without any kind of discrimination, to comprehensive, appropriate and timely, quality health services determined at the national level according to needs, as well as access to safe, effective, and affordable quality medicines, while ensuring that the use of such services does not expose users to financial difficulties, especially groups in conditions of vulnerability. Universal access to health and universal health coverage require determining and implementing policies and actions with a multisectoral approach to address the social determinants of health and promote a society-wide commitment to fostering health and well-being.



# Values that support the strategy

According to the WHO Constitution, “The enjoyment of the highest attainable standard of health is one of the fundamental rights of every human being without distinction of race, religion, political belief, economic or social condition,” and this is the core value of universal access to health and universal health coverage. This right should be promoted and protected without distinction of age, ethnicity, sex, gender, sexual orientation, language, national origin, place of birth, or any other condition, and this requires linkages with other related rights. This right, along with equity and solidarity are the values that support the strategy.

## Four strategic lines

- 1) Expanding equitable access to comprehensive, quality, people- and community-centered health services.
- 2) Strengthening stewardship and governance.
- 3) Increasing and improving financing, with equity and efficiency, and advancing toward the elimination of direct payments that constitute a barrier to access at the point of service.
- 4) Strengthening multisectoral coordination to address the social determinants of health that ensure the sustainability of universal coverage.



# Challenges for advancing toward universal access to health and universal health coverage

Despite progress and economic growth, poverty and inequities remain a challenge for the Region, both among and within countries.

- Barriers to access, exclusion and changing needs.
- Inefficient models of care and service networks that fail to adequately meet current needs. Limited response and managerial capacity of the first level of care.
- Segmentation and fragmentation of health systems and services.
- Health financing deficit and/or inefficiencies.
- Weak governance and leadership of the health authority in the face of new challenges, including social and intersectoral participation.
- Health outcomes below expectations, in some cases unacceptably so. Rising costs and inefficiencies, and challenges to the sustainability of systems.



“As this debate begins, I wish to encourage you to consider not only problems and obstacles, but what are those solutions and innovative approaches that will allow us to advance toward universal health coverage. To achieve this objective, it is necessary to transform health systems and you; you are the ones who can make that happen.”

Carissa F. Etienne, 2014

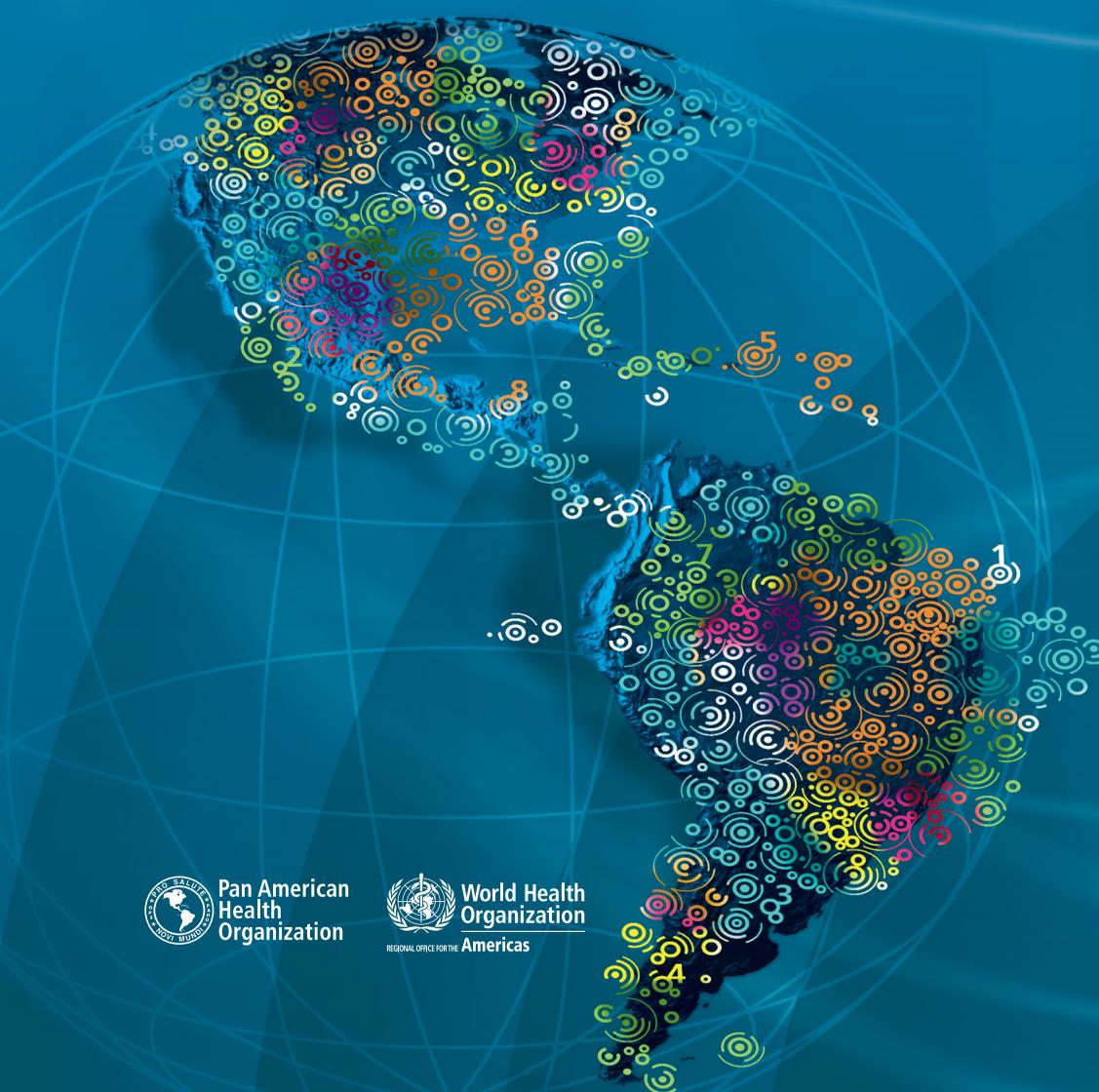
# Acknowledgements

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# PAHO Mission

To lead strategic collaborative efforts among Member States and other partners to promote equity in health, to combat disease, and to improve the quality of, and lengthen, the lives of the peoples of the Americas.



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