

LAC HEALTH SECTOR REFORM INITIATIVE
(PAHO/WHO - USAID - M & L Project - PHRplus Project)

**Regional Forum 2002: "The Challenge of the HIV-AIDS
Pandemic for the Reform and Strengthening of Health
Systems and Services in LAC"**

Ocho Rios, Jamaica - February 20 -22, 2002

1. Introduction:

The Latin American and Caribbean sub-region (LAC) currently faces the awesome challenge of coping with the HIV/AIDS pandemic. The Caribbean has the second highest rate of HIV infection in the world¹, after only Sub-Saharan Africa, and Latin America has more than 1.5 million people living with HIV/AIDS (PLWHA)². Specific countries like Bahamas, Belize, Brazil, Bermuda, Dominica, Guatemala, Haiti, Honduras and Jamaica are at an advanced stage of the epidemic or at great risk of its rapid escalation³, but the seriousness of the situation is also of great concern all over LAC.

The Pan American Health Organization/Regional Headquarters of the World Health Organization for the Americas (PAHO/WHO) has been active in promoting the sharing of information about the diversity in patterns of spread and response to the epidemic across the Region. Notably, an extensive epidemiological review of the situation in LAC was produced as a result of a meeting involving PAHO/WHO, the Joint United Nations Program on HIV/AIDS

¹ UN (2001), Global Crisis - Global Action. Declaration of Commitment on HIV/AIDS. UN Special Section on HIV/AIDS (25-27 June).

² UN (2001).

(UNAIDS), the Monitoring the AIDS Pandemic Network (MAP) and the Caribbean Epidemiological Network for HIV/AIDS (LAC EpiNet).⁴

Health systems all over the sub-region are suffering the consequences of a lack of organization and planning for the increase in the demand for - and use of - services, which undermines already limited capacities to ensure access for everyone and quality care according to established standards. This overwhelming demand for care is generated ultimately by HIV/AIDS specific interventions, but health systems are also expected to be increasingly taxed by the growing number of patients with HIV/AIDS related opportunistic diseases, psychological stress and need for palliative care.

Few governments and societies in the region have managed to assure the necessary policies, resources and capabilities for coping with HIV/AIDS based on a comprehensive approach. This is occurring at a time when countries throughout the region are undergoing processes of fiscal adjustment that reduce social spending and hence damage already resource-constrained health facilities and health systems with limited funding.

The number of projects and grants that support that approach is very limited, even among major financial cooperation agencies. For instance, the World Bank has only four ongoing projects on HIV/AIDS prevention and control in LAC - Argentina, Barbados, Brazil and Dominican Republic, and the Inter-American Development Bank (IADB) is still in the process of designing its own strategy to cooperate with the countries in combating HIV/AIDS. The efforts on health services and systems research related to HIV/AIDS in the region are still to be fully assessed, but a preliminary search in the literature shows that the LAC reality is far from being a common subject for studies.

³ PAHO/WHO(2000), Building Blocks: Proceedings of the Consultations on Standards of Care for PLWHA in the Americas, Washington DC: PAHO/WHO - UNAIDS - IAPAC

⁴ PAHO/WHO (2001), HIV and AIDS in the Americas: an epidemic with many faces, Washington DC: PAHO/WHO – UNAIDS – LAC EpiNet – MAP

With very few exceptions, during the last 15 years the fight against AIDS in LAC has focused almost exclusively on the prevention of HIV transmission⁵. The emphasis on primary prevention was an appropriate public health approach during a phase of the epidemic when the reduction of new infections was of paramount concern. While this approach continues to play a major role in diminishing the burden of the disease, the dramatic increase in the number of people living with HIV/AIDS (PLWHA) in the current phase of the global pandemic has created a demand for services that cater to the medical, emotional and social needs of PLWHA, their families as well as caregivers. This orientation is also fundamental to the HIV/AIDS comprehensive care model – the “Building Block Framework” – developed by PAHO/WHO, where comprehensive care is defined as *“a multidisciplinary integrated approach to providing care and support services for PLWHA, their family members and the community at large”*⁶.

Recently, the achievements of the **UN Special Section on HIV/AIDS (June 25-27, 2001)** represented a milestone in the struggle against this pandemic. Industrialized and developing countries alike from North to South have jointly committed to a ten year endeavor to enhance **new strategies that integrate preventive programs with care, support and treatment of all people living with and/or affected by HIV/AIDS**. This concept is based on the idea that the separation between prevention, care and treatment appears to be highly artificial. Scientific evidence supports the view that *“...prevention, care, support and treatment for those infected and affected by HIV/AIDS are mutually reinforcing elements of an effective response and must be integrated in a comprehensive approach to combat the epidemic”*⁷.

⁵ Girma, Mesaye and Helen Schietinger (1998), "Integrating HIV/AIDS Prevention, Care and Support: A Rationale", Discussion Paper on HIV/AIDS Care and Support No.1. Arlington, VA: HTS Project- USAID

⁶ PAHO/WHO(2000), Building Blocks: Proceedings of the Consultations on Standards of Care for PLWHA in the Americas, Washington DC: PAHO/WHO - UNAIDS - IAPAC

⁷ UN (2001).

To support that new approach the UN Secretary-General – Kofy Annan called for the urgent implementation of the **Global AIDS & Health Fund**, which will immediately allocate significant amounts of financial resources to scale up the response of health systems and services to the HIV/AIDS pandemic. In both the short and long run, governments, NGOs and international cooperation organizations will be able to **access this fund and make feasible specific actions for health sector reform and health systems strengthening that have high impact on HIV/AIDS**, tuberculosis and malaria prevention, care and treatment⁸. This includes the eminently important issue of assuring access to all needed medications for millions of patients, including anti-retroviral therapy, as one of the fundamental elements of the comprehensive strategy to combat the pandemic⁹.

Also in that context, WHO–Headquarters¹⁰ recently started a **broad process of regional consultations on “The Global Health Sector Strategy for Strengthening the Health Sector Response to HIV/AIDS”**, aiming to generate technical consensus on essential elements of this strategy and anticipate implementation challenges and practical implications for action, at global and regional levels, on how to better assist authorities of Member States in the task of combating HIV/AIDS.

The issue of HIV/AIDS in the Americas was similarly given due attention by the Governing Bodies of PAHO/WHO at its 43rd Directing Council meeting in September 2001. The Council urged Member States to give high priority to fighting this pandemic, seeking to **link comprehensive care models with sound primary prevention strategies** and facilitate inter-agency, inter-institutional and inter-sectoral responses at national and regional levels¹¹.

⁸ Annan, K. (2001), Speech to the 54th. World Health Assembly, Geneva, May 17th.

⁹ UN (2001).

¹⁰ In accordance with the Resolution 53.14 of the World Health Assembly

¹¹ PAHO/WHO (2001), 43rd Directing Council/53rd Session of the Regional Committee, CD43/6

2. Purpose:

PAHO/WHO and USAID are leading organizations in the fight against HIV/AIDS in LAC. Both of them have recently stated, respectively through PAHO's Executive Committee¹² and USAID's Administrator¹³ that confronting the HIV/AIDS pandemic is a high priority issue to ensure health, sustainable development, human rights and happiness for the people of the Americas. Both of them are adopting the UN recommended "prevention-care-treatment" integrated strategy, as presented in USAID's "Prevention - Care Continuum" and PAHO's "Building Blocks Guidelines".

The LACHSR Initiative's partner organizations and projects, in the face of new challenges and responsibilities that have emerged from the UN special session and other recent international meetings¹⁴, have decided to launch a **"Regional Forum on The Challenge of HIV/AIDS for the Reform and Strengthening of Health Systems and Services in LAC"**. This event will also serve as the WHO/AMRO regional consultation to *"consolidate issues, actions and processes needed to strengthen health sector response to the HIV/AIDS epidemic"*¹⁵.

This proposal has been developed taking into consideration the relatively embryonic stage of development of the previously mentioned integrated and comprehensive approach, as well as the almost complete lack of research and knowledge generation/dissemination about the specificity of the approach by LAC countries in coping with HIV/AIDS. **The Regional Forum must adopt a predominantly prospective outlook**, with reference to brief and objective reviews of what has already been done in the Region.

¹² Resolution CE128.R16

¹³ Testimony before the House of Representatives on May 17, 2001

¹⁴ The Ibero-America Summit of Heads of State - November/2000; The Caribbean Partnership Against HIV/AIDS - February/2001, among others.

¹⁵ WHO (2001), Regional consultations on "The Global Health Sector Strategy for Strengthening the Health Sector Response to HIV/AIDS"

Given the complexity of the services required for the effective implementation of HIV/AIDS comprehensive care, it is hoped that the Regional Forum/Consultation will contribute to a better understanding of: current and future needs for care; existing and proposed models of care; standards of care and indications for intervention; policies and actions as part of a global strategy; and strategies for implementing the recommendations of experts.

The Initiative's Regional Forum / WHO-AMRO Regional Consultation aims in particular to:

- Address the issue of how to scale up health systems to combat HIV/AIDS and on discussions about the issue with regard to the Global Health Sector Strategy from regional, sub-regional and national perspectives;
- Conduct an in-depth discussion on how to improve health sector response to HIV/AIDS;
- Generate specific strategies for health systems development and reform to face the HIV/AIDS challenge that fit LAC realities;
- Boost cooperation between governments, NGOs, technical and financial cooperation agencies and donors in the area;
- Enable the Initiative partners and other organizations to establish a system for providing technical assistance and for monitoring and evaluating the countries' efforts on focusing specific aspects of their own health sector reforms to face the HIV/AIDS epidemic; and
- Identify potential incorporation of activities related to health sector reform and HIV/AIDS in a possible second phase of the LACHSR Initiative.

3. Expected results and outcomes:

To support the Forum discussions, a comprehensive background paper is in the process of being prepared, aiming to provide a strong theoretical basis and evidence-based lessons learned to guide the development of an appropriate, pragmatic integrated approach to the reality of HIV/AIDS in LAC. The background paper will be presented at the Forum and will also be used as a source of reference for PAHO/WHO technical cooperation activities in the countries of the Region to help combat the epidemic. Terms of reference for all the speakers will be prepared in advance to guide the presentations. Guidelines for working group discussions will also be prepared, in order to assure that all main issues will be covered.

A **final report** summarizing the back ground paper, panel discussions, working group sessions, conclusions and recommendations will be published, about two months after the Forum: (i) in print as part of the LACHSR Publications series; and (ii) electronically in the Clearinghouse on Health Sector Reform. Highlights of the forum will be featured in a **special edition of Reform in Motion** (the newsletter for the dissemination of information on health sector reform in Latin America and the Caribbean) that will be dedicated to the topic of HIV/AIDS in LAC.

Results of discussions and contents of documents prepared for or as a result of the forum will contribute to the **position paper** to be presented by PAHO to WHO - as the outcome of the WHO/AMRO Regional Consultation on how to scale up health systems to combat HIV/AIDS. An abridged version of the position paper will be prepared for a panel on HIV/AIDS to be jointly organized by PAHO and the Inter-American Development Bank (IADB) during the 2002 meeting of the Board of Governors of the IADB, which will happen in Fortaleza-Brazil in April, 2002.

All the forum's materials will be organized into a book, to be published as one of the Initiative's Special Edition publications, together with other

products from the partners related to HSR/Health Systems Strengthening to cope with HIV/AIDS. The book will be distributed to all the ministries of health in LAC countries, social security institutes, HIV/AIDS related NGOs, PAHO's PWRs, USAID country offices, PHRplus and MSH central and field offices. The book will also be disseminated through major international events on HIV/AIDS that will take place in 2002, including the Barcelona World AIDS Conference and specific congresses in LAC, where panels about the discussions and conclusions of the forum could be presented.

The participants at the regional forum, and other experts from the region, both in HIV/AIDS prevention and control programs and in different aspects of health systems management, will constitute a **specialized network**. This network will be dedicated to exchanging lessons learned, experiences and knowledge, and to facilitating follow ups to the discussions and updates on strategies, through the Initiative's Clearinghouse.

Finally, **the main outcome must be the generation of specific strategies**, both for the countries and for technical and financial cooperation agencies, to implement programs and activities that follow the comprehensive approach towards integrating prevention, care, treatment and support for all PLWHA.