

FOREWORD

The commitment assumed by the countries of the Region of the Americas at the World Summit for Children in 1990 remains valid and continues to be a priority at the national level and for the Pan American Health Organization (PAHO).

This commitment has been incorporated into the mandate received by the Organization at the 1994 Pan American Sanitary Conference, which approved the strategic and programmatic orientations for PAHO in the period 1995-1998: health in human development; health systems and services development; health promotion and protection; environmental development and protection; and disease prevention and control. All these orientations are aimed at addressing the paramount challenge of overcoming the inequity that is manifested in differences in access to and coverage of health services and in the health conditions of the population.

One of the strategies adopted by the majority of the countries as a means of progressing toward equity in the framework of health reform efforts is to support processes of decentralization and development of local health systems. The value of this strategy is especially evident in the development of integrated maternal and child health activities at the local level, where the active participation of all the social actors involved in the production of health can be seen most clearly.

To achieve this objective, health services at the local level must have guidelines and procedures that enable them to apply knowledge with quality and efficiency.

The technical material contained in this publication is the product of a variety of experiences currently being carried out in the countries with the support of a number of international cooperation agencies in order to attain the common objective of improving the health of mothers and children.

The presentation of this material in a single volume is intended to facilitate the integration of activities and make health care for this population group a continuous and active process in which health promotion and disease prevention are priorities.

It is our hope that this publication will be used in the process of training health service personnel and as a practical instrument for the implementation of health activities at the local level.

PAHO, through its personnel in each country and its regional programs, will continue to coordinate its efforts with those of the other agencies involved in the preparation of this publication, with a view to achieving the goals of the World Summit for Children and thus contributing to a better future for the peoples of the Americas.

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