

Moving towards a New Century of Health in the Americas

Annual Report of the Director – 2003



Pan American Health Organization
Pan American Sanitary Bureau,
Regional Office of the
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Mission of the Pan American Sanitary Bureau

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 peoples of the Americas.

To the Member Countries

In accordance with the Constitution of the Pan American Health Organization, I have the honor to submit the 2002–2003 annual report on activities of the Pan American Sanitary Bureau, Regional Office of the World Health Organization. Within the context of the strategic and programmatic orientations for the 1999–2002 quadrennium, defined by the Governing Bodies of the Pan American Health Organization, the report analyzes the salient activities of the Organization’s technical cooperation program during this period.

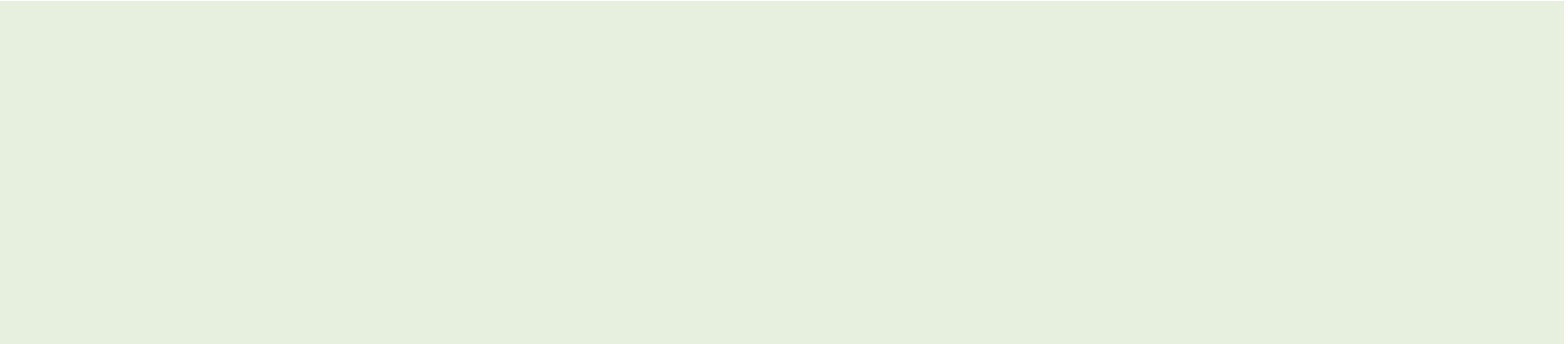
The report is complemented by the *Interim Financial Report of the Director for the Year 2000*.



Mirta Roses Periago
Director

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Message of the Director

I am optimistic about the Organization's future. Working in close connection with all the political, technical, and social networks, and mobilizing the resources and alliances that are or may become available, it will be able to continue service in Member States.

For the Pan American Health Organization's history, 2002 was a very special year. Throughout the year and in every corner of the Americas, the countries celebrated the first 100 years of their Organization, as they also reviewed and acknowledged the advances and challenges dealing with their populations' health.

In compliance with a constitutional mandate, the 26th Pan American Sanitary Conference, which gathered on September 23–27, received the progress report on the quadrennial strategic and programmatic orientations established in 1998, analyzed the information compiled regarding the health situation in the Americas for 1997–2000, reviewed the performance of the essential public health functions, and approved the Pan American Sanitary Bureau's Strategic Plan for 2003–2007. Thus, Director George A. O. Alleyne's two terms came to a successful close, and a new Director was elected.

I am deeply honored to be the first woman elected to hold this position, which carries with it the responsibility for complying with the mandates set for steering the Organization's way in this new historical cycle.

The situation we face is filled with complexity and uncertainty, and the daily changes we experience are the most rapid and profound humankind has ever known. And yet, human beings have never had such powerful scientific and technical tools nor more accumulated knowledge at hand. Were humankind truly to move toward wisdom, it must be aware, at every step, of its own ignorance, and be humbled in the face of the vast chasm between what is known and what is actually applied toward the collective good. The disparity between the "haves" and the "have-nots" is the greatest hurdle to be surmounted in achieving progress throughout the world.

The incipient but growing individual and collective awareness of the vulnerability and interdependence of neighbors in this global village presages an era of solidarity and cooperation. Health, traditionally and universally the most appropriate field for collaborative action, is the most highly-prized value in every culture and circumstance, both as a good in and of itself and as a means for achieving other ends.

Our Organization, established 100 years ago by 11 young American republics carried along in a shared historical tide, now encompasses all peoples, nations, and territories from the Bering Strait to Cape Horn. As such, it is an Organization that is well aware of the force and results of collective, joint, and synergic action for common public health objectives.

During the centennial celebration, significant documents were reviewed; many publications extolled the history of and progress in health of the populations of the Americas; and regional, national, and community heroes who fought for and made contributions to knowledge, health, and disease prevention and control were honored.

Veterans recollected and plumbed their memories to detail for us those critical times in the struggle in which they played key roles. Younger participants told of their dreams and hopes for a better, more equitable world in which they can develop to their fullest potential and continue helping to improve the living conditions of all inhabitants. Children played, drew, sang, and wrote about the importance of living and growing up healthy and free of pain and suffering.

Health workers, science and technology centers, and academic institutions connected with the health professions took advantage of the occasion to analyze accomplishments and difficulties that lie ahead on the road to the goal of health for all.

Nongovernmental organizations, religious institutions, sister organizations of the inter-American and United Nations systems, bilateral cooperation organizations, international foundations, professional associations, the private sector, and philanthropic institutions joined together to celebrate a century of progress in public health in the Americas.

The mass media, local and community press outlets, and internationally-known artists and athletes enthusiastically joined the cause of health and gave space and time to spread positive, laudatory messages about the Organization's work and the cause of health. Sixteen countries issued commemorative postal stamps.

Presidents, heads of state, first ladies, ministers, legislators, mayors, social security institutions, and water and environmental health companies honored the Organization and the principal actors in this 100-year history. The Organization itself, its flag, and its Director received the highest honors from three countries and from the Caribbean Community (CARICOM).

We now must properly preserve this rich scientific and cultural heritage of our first century for future generations.

The assessment of the quadrennial strategic and programmatic orientations, as well as the report on health in the Americas, demonstrated significant progress in the indicators. An average increase of 0.9 years in life expectancy at birth in every country of the Region save one, has led to a life expectancy of 70 or more years. Infant mortality fell 9%, on average, and the estimated child mortality rates declined by an average of 9.5%. The Region is free of poliomyelitis and indigenous measles, and the countries have established the goal of eliminating rubella and congenital rubella syndrome; there have been significant reductions in Chagas' disease and leprosy; and the last cases of cholera, which had reappeared in the Region in 1991, were reported in 2002.

Advances in blood safety have been noteworthy: more than 20 countries screen between 90% and 100% of blood for transfusions to detect HIV, hepatitis B and C, and syphilis. All children in the Region receive a minimum of 10 immunizing antigens, and vaccination coverage with the highest-quality biologic agents is increasingly widespread and timely.

In most of the countries, a second round of health sector reforms, more focused on including and protecting all inhabitants, ensuring the performance of essential functions, strengthening the public health infrastructure, and addressing health determinants through agreed-upon intersectoral actions and public policies, is under way.

New constitutional reforms and health legislation recently passed in many countries acknowledge the contribution that the peoples' health makes to sustainable human development. Health is considered to be a stabilizing element that ensures governance and steady, equitable economic growth by strengthening citizenship-building and guaranteeing the enjoyment of basic rights.

The successes achieved are the result of the enormous commitment made by the countries and society to the goals and objectives that were established jointly as a result of their growing understanding of the intrinsic value of health and its close relationship to the nations' individual and collective progress.

This is why I am optimistic about the Organization's future. Working in close connection with all the political, technical, and social networks, and mobilizing the resources and alliances that are or may become available, it will be able to continue serving Member States, setting forth the goals and the most successful strategies to ensure that the unfinished agenda is addressed, that the gains that have been realized are maintained, and that the new challenges are faced.

Let us celebrate our past, act upon our present, and build our future.