

Remarks for HHS Deputy Secretary Bill Corr
World Health Day
April 5, 2013

Good morning. Thank you, Dr. Etienne, for that introduction, and congratulations on a successful start to your tenure. It's a pleasure to be here alongside so many dedicated leaders, advocates, providers, partners, and students to celebrate World Health Day 2013. I know this will be an engaging and productive program.

I'd like to begin by congratulating Maria Gomez and her team at Mary's Center, who will be receiving some well-earned recognition later in today's program. The comprehensive approach to community health at Mary's Center—which includes screening and prevention of hypertension—serves as an inspiring model for those who are working to improve the health and wellbeing of our families and communities.

I'd also like to recognize the extraordinary efforts of the Caribbean community in helping to bring noncommunicable diseases to the attention of the world. PAHO, and CARICOM in particular, have been tireless leaders in emphasizing the importance of combating chronic lifestyle-related diseases—and the choice of this year's theme is a testament to their dedication.

As you know, our theme is hypertension. It's a grave condition, of course, but it's also one that highlights the tremendous importance of PAHO and other multinational organizations represented here today. We come from a variety of countries, each of which faces a unique set of health challenges. But noncommunicable diseases like hypertension are a problem that we *all* face, no matter what nation we represent. And by shining a light on our common challenges, we're reminded of our capacity to meet them together.

Today, noncommunicable diseases account for nearly two thirds of global mortality. And tragically, almost thirty percent of those deaths strike people before they reach the age of sixty. In addition to the loss of life, over the next twenty years noncommunicable diseases are expected to cost more than thirty trillion dollars worldwide—dragging countless families into poverty, and stifling economic growth in every country. When it comes to conditions like hypertension, the scope of the challenge before us is undeniably large.

So it's our responsibility to do everything we can to address the problem of chronic noncommunicable diseases, knowing that the progress we make on this front has the power to lift up all people. It's going to require a broad and sustained effort, with input that crosses all the borders of our nations, our sectors, and our societies. In that regard, it's the kind of challenge

that collaborative multinational organizations like PAHO and the WHO are especially well-equipped to take on—and that work is already well underway.

Over the past two years, we've seen unprecedented levels of attention focused on noncommunicable diseases and their risk factors like hypertension. That is largely thanks to the leadership of PAHO, its member states, and the WHO. The Action Plans being developed both globally by the WHO and regionally by PAHO are taking into account the need for wide-ranging solutions that tackle risk factors from every angle. That means working with governments to increase access to early detection and treatment; working with individuals to take advantage of that access and maintain a healthy lifestyle; and working with the commercial sector to reduce sodium levels in foods. That is the sort of broad-based action that is going to help the global community hit its targets of a thirty percent drop in salt intake, a twenty-five percent drop in hypertension, and a twenty-five percent drop in premature mortality due to noncommunicable diseases by 2025.

I want to commend PAHO for leading the way on this work through its Pan American Action Forum on noncommunicable diseases. And for establishing a multilateral consortium focused on dietary salt reduction—an effort that has already brought together private and public sector leaders from across the Americas.

Reducing sodium intake is a critical part of fighting back against hypertension. And we'll need to keep promoting positive habits on the personal and the nationwide level. But we also know that lifestyle changes alone won't be enough to tackle the rising threat posed by hypertension and other noncommunicable diseases. We also need policy changes that promote healthy communities and improve access to preventive services and care.

That's why here in the United States we were proud to cosponsor the Universal Health Coverage Resolution that was adopted at the UN General Assembly in December. Of course, expanding access to prevention and care is chiefly the responsibility of national governments. But multilateral voices like PAHO and the WHO can play a vital role as champions for universal health coverage. They have the expertise to support countries that are working toward expansion. They have the ear of the international community.

And the world is going to need strong leadership on this issue. More than a billion adults suffering from hypertension across the globe are counting on strong leadership from those who have the capacity to lead. Universal health coverage is not an end unto itself—but it is an essential goal that will help improve health outcomes across the board. And we believe that it is a goal that can unify the world in its shared pursuit of better health.

That belief has been at the heart of our domestic efforts here in the U.S. As you know, expanding access to health coverage has been one of the cornerstone goals of President Obama's agenda since taking office four years ago. And thanks to the Affordable Care Act, that goal is poised to become a reality. We're dramatically expanding Americans' access to quality coverage, putting new rules in place to prevent the worst insurance industry abuses, and reforming our system to drive down the cost of care and prioritize preventive health.

One of the most important programs we've put into place to help bolster those efforts is the Million Hearts initiative. Million Hearts is a public-private partnership that is applying the same holistic approach to the fight against hypertension here in the U.S. that PAHO and the WHO are bringing to the international stage. We launched Million Hearts in 2011 with the goal of preventing one million heart attacks and strokes over the next five years—and we're already seeing great progress in our efforts to improve access to effective care, educate the public about heart-healthy behaviors, and bolster preventive services. You'll be hearing more about this initiative from Dr. Sonia Angell of the CDC later in today's program.

We've also continued to support critical multinational partnerships, including the Global Alliance for Chronic Diseases—of which I know many of you are partners. And you'll be hearing more about that work from Dr. Rabadán-Diehl of the NIH later today. The NIH is helping to support the Alliance's efforts to curb chronic noncommunicable diseases in South America and Africa, including the initiative it launched last year specifically to address hypertension.

This is precisely the sort of work we need to continue as we look to address the epidemic of hypertension. Expanding access to coverage within our own borders, forging partnerships beyond our borders, and promoting better health everywhere—those will remain the key ingredients as we ramp up our fight against chronic noncommunicable diseases.

And thanks to institutions like PAHO, we have a tremendous opportunity to meet this global challenge with the global response it demands. We know that we can be effective when we bring our common ideas, our common resources, and our common vision to bear on a problem of worldwide concern.

Let us always remember that hypertension is a preventable condition. It isn't a lightning strike or an unusual accident. It can be prevented—and countless lives can be saved—if we continue to commit ourselves to action. And this World Health Day marks an important milestone in that action.

We look forward to the progress we'll make thanks to collaborations like the one taking place today. And we look forward to continuing our work together as partners in the years ahead.

Thank you.