PAHO’s Accomplishments with Countries in Latin America and the Caribbean: Highlights of Region-Wide Activities

PAHO, as the World’s oldest public health institution, has been leading cervical and breast cancer prevention and control efforts in Latin America and the Caribbean for many years. Our main focus has been to strengthen country capacity to better prevent, screen and detect at earlier stages, and treat women for cervical and breast cancer. We are elevating the priority of women’s cancers on the public health agenda, as well as translating the best available scientific evidence and tools into national policies, programs and services for women’s cancers.

• **ELEVATING PUBLIC HEALTH COMMITMENTS** through PAHO’s relationships with Ministers of Health and Ministry of Health authorities, national public health commitments for women’s cancers have been established through several PAHO Directing Council resolutions which include: Regional Strategy and Plan of Action for Cervical Cancer Prevention and Control, and the Regional Strategy for the Prevention and Control of Non-communicable Diseases (NCDs).

• **CREATING PARTNERSHIPS FOR A MULTI-SECTORAL AND MULTI-STAKEHOLDER RESPONSE,** through the Women’s Cancer Initiative of the Pan American Forum for Action on NCDs. This is creating synergies and coordinating efforts among all relevant players in the field of women’s cancers.

• **GENERATING KNOWLEDGE AND UNDERSTANDING OF THE COUNTRY SITUATION AND CAPACITY TO ADDRESS CERVICAL AND BREAST CANCER:**
  - PAHO has led national cervical cancer program assessments and conducted situation analyses for cervical cancer programs in over 15 countries. This has led to better information and appreciation of the local burden of disease, capacity to provide programs and services, and needs to scale up better access to care.
  - We have conducted national NCD program capacity surveys with all countries in the region, and produced country profiles, which includes information about the existence of national cancer policies, plans and programs as well as availability of early detection, diagnosis and treatment services across countries in the region.

• **PROVIDING EVIDENCE BASED GUIDELINES AND PRACTICAL TOOLS,** to assist Ministry of Health program managers to plan and implement cervical and breast cancer programs.

• **CONDUCTING COST EFFECTIVENESS ANALYSES FOR BREAST AND CERVICAL CANCER.** PAHO is working with Member States to support decision making processes to strengthen cervical cancer prevention and control through cost-effectiveness studies using the CERVIVAC model of PAHO’s ProVac Initiative to evaluate HPV vaccination and new screening strategies. In addition, using the WHO CHOICE model for cost-effectiveness analyses, PAHO is assisting member states to evaluate breast cancer screening strategies through cost effectiveness analyses.

• **CONDUCTING OPERATIONAL RESEARCH,** to evaluate the effectiveness of cervical cancer screening strategies, including VIA and cryotherapy.

• **CONVENING FOR KNOWLEDGE EXCHANGE AND SOUTH-SOUTH COLLABORATION,** including several region wide multi-stakholder meetings.

• **COMMUNICATING TO RAISE AWARENESS,** through traditional and social media and professional associations. This has raised public and health professional awareness of the women’s cancer problem and solutions.

• **ACCELERATING INTRODUCTION OF HPV VACCINES AND NEW SCREENING TESTS,** through traditional and social media and professional associations. This has raised public and health professional awareness of the women’s cancer problem and solutions.
  - HPV vaccine available through PAHO’s revolving fund at a unique reduced price for all countries in the region
  - Development of a monitoring and evaluation framework for HPV vaccination introduction and impact.
  - HPV DNA testing and VIA screening increasingly available through National Cervical Cancer prevention and control programs.
PAHO’S COUNTRY SPECIFIC ACTIVITIES ON WOMEN’S CANCERS
Achievements and ongoing efforts in Latin America and the Caribbean
PAHO is working with Member States and partners to mount and sustain national comprehensive cancer prevention and control programs, including breast and cervical cancer. Highlights of recent achievements and ongoing efforts across numerous countries include the following:

1 **STRENGTHENED COUNTRY POLICIES, PLANS AND PROGRAMS FOR WOMEN’S CANCERS**

- Operational research projects on alternative screening strategies in: Peru, El Salvador, and Suriname.
- Developed and implemented the Caribbean Cervical Cancer Prevention and Control Project.
- Cervical cancer program strengthened in Argentina, Bolivia, El Salvador, Guatemala, Honduras, Nicaragua, Paraguay and Suriname. Activities in Suriname have included a National workshop with all relevant stakeholders to develop an action plan for the implementation of the National Cervical Cancer Prevention and Control Program.
- Assistance with National Cancer Prevention and Control plans in Ecuador, Honduras, Nicaragua, Panama, Peru and Trinidad and Tobago.
- Developed and implemented the Central America Sub regional Plan for Cancer Prevention and Control.

2 **GREATER KNOWLEDGE AND AWARENESS AMONG WOMEN, THEIR PARTNERS AND HEALTH PROVIDERS ABOUT WOMEN’S CANCERS**

- Community health workers and health promoters trained in Argentina, Bolivia, Guatemala, Peru and Paraguay, where they have been instrumental to improve women’s knowledge and uptake of cervical and breast cancer screening and treatment, helping them overcome the barriers that often prevent them from seeking these services.
- Community outreach campaigns in Argentina have targeted over 11 million women with media messages, videos and short films and “jornadas de mujeres” among other strategies. Communication messages have been developed in indigenous languages to ensure that the most vulnerable populations are adequately reached.
- In Honduras 37,500 educational materials have been disseminated to increase community awareness about highly preventable and frequent cancer types.
- In Guatemala, women’s testimonials have been gathered to raise awareness among their peers about cervical cancer screening. Additionally, education materials have been distributed and used for educational sessions in the health care centers and community outreach activities across the countries.

3 **INCREASED INTRODUCTION OF HPV VACCINATION AND CERVICAL CANCER SCREENING STRATEGIES**

- HPV vaccination has been introduced into the national immunization programs of 5 LAC countries: Mexico, Panama, Colombia, Peru, Argentina.
- New technologies are being increasingly introduced into the cervical cancer prevention and control national programs, including VIA (Guatemala, El Salvador, Nicaragua, Haiti, Colombia, Peru, and Bolivia) and HPV DNA testing (Mexico and Argentina).
- HPV prevalence study in Jamaica to assist with decision making on HPV vaccine introduction.
**4 IMPROVED COMPETENCIES OF HEALTH CARE PROVIDERS TO DELIVER SERVICES FOR WOMEN’S CANCER**

- Development of national norms and guidelines and training for their application. As an example of these efforts, in Guatemala, cervical cancer norms, guides and standardized protocols for early detection and treatment of pre-cancerous as well as a cervical cancer pathology manual have been developed, printed and distributed in the 29 Health Care Areas of the country.

- Training of primary health care providers and gynecologists to deliver high quality screening, early detection and treatment services. In Bolivia and Guatemala over 300 primary health care providers have been trained over the past 2 years for visual inspection with acetic acid (VIA) and treatment with cryotherapy. In Argentina, human resources have been trained for the introduction of HPV testing followed by triage with pap as the screening strategy in selected provinces. In all these countries, gynecologists have been trained in colposcopy to improve.

- Infrastructure improvements and provision of necessary equipment, supplies and other inputs in priority countries, including Argentina, Bolivia, Guatemala, Honduras, and Paraguay.

- External evaluation of radiology services have been undertaken in Costa Rica, El Salvador, Honduras, and Panama.

- National courses on mammography have been held in El Salvador, Costa Rica, Cuba, Honduras, Guatemala, Jamaica, Nicaragua, Paraguay, and Panama.

**5 INCREASED COVERAGE OF SCREENING, ESPECIALLY AMONG WOMEN WHO HAD NEVER BEEN SCREENED**

- In Argentina, more than twice as many women have been screened than previous periods, in high burden provinces.

- In Paraguay, 24,922 at-risk women are benefiting from improved cervical cancer prevention and control services.

**6 IMPROVED CAPACITY FOR FOLLOW UP AND TREATMENT OF WOMEN WITH ABNORMAL SCREENING RESULTS**

- In Guatemala and Bolivia, efforts to expand VIA and cryotherapy services have brought screening and treatment of precancerous lesions closer to women’s communities, increasing coverage and follow up care.

- In Paraguay, the referral and contrarreferal system has been revised and strengthened to ensure adequate follow up and timely treatment of precancerous lesions.

- In Argentina, a nominal screening information system has been implemented, enabling active follow up of women with abnormal results.

- In Honduras, colposcopy services were assessed to identify training and equipment needs and redesign the distribution of human and physical resources to provide these services.

**7 IMPROVED RADIOTHERAPY SERVICES FOR CANCER TREATMENT**

- PAHO’s radiation health program has evaluated and helped improve cancer treatment services in Panama, Costa Rica, Nicaragua, Trinidad & Tobago and Honduras.

**8 IMPROVED CANCER INFORMATION**

- Training on cancer registration to improve the quality and completeness of cancer information has been held in: Brazil, Colombia, Chile, Ecuador.

**9 EVIDENCE BASED DECISIONS ON HPV VACCINATION AND NEW SCREENING STRATEGIES FOR CERVICAL CANCER, THROUGH THE CERVIVAC COST-EFFECTIVENESS STUDIES**

- The CERVIVAC model of PAHO’s ProVac Initiative is being used by several countries to conduct cost-effectiveness analysis of cervical cancer prevention strategies, including HPV vaccination of young girls and cervical cancer screening of adult women.

- There are 10 ongoing studies in Central and South America: Guatemala, Honduras, Costa Rica, Ecuador, Argentina, Bolivia, Paraguay, Peru, Argentina, and Uruguay, and one study has been finalized in Jamaica.