

Preface

Health in the Americas, 2012 Edition, is the latest official five-year report on the health situation, health determinants, and health trends in the Americas issued by the Pan American Health Organization's Secretariat. This edition covers the 2006–2010 period and will be presented to the 28th Pan American Sanitary Conference in September 2012. As have previous editions, this one encompasses two broad and complementary sections—one describes and analyzes the health situation in each of the Region's 48 countries and territories; the other examines the salient health issue in the Region as a whole.

For the first time in the publication's long and unbroken history, this 15th edition of *Health in the Americas* is being made available as an electronic publication, thus broadening the opportunities to disseminate it to a wider readership. The publication's primary audience includes health authorities, academics, professionals, students, health workers, and others in the health field, as well as technical and financial cooperation agencies and other international audiences. The public at large, especially those readers who wish to learn more about the health situation in a specific country or who are interested in exploring the major health issues affecting the Region as a whole, also are meant to use this publication. Online publishing offers additional advantages: the capability to periodically update the data and information and a way to interact more fully with readers, all of which will enrich the content and refine it for subsequent editions.

One of the greatest challenges for the more than 600 authors and collaborators who worked on this publication was to significantly shorten their content compared to that of previous editions. This distilled content is supplemented by the use of hyperlinks to sites, publications, and databases that enhance the information presented in the text, thus providing readers with additional options for research, analysis, and learning.

As part of this official report, a printed publication also was issued, which contains a summary profile of each country chapter plus a regional overview chapter. *Health in the Americas, 2012 Edition*, is being presented along with the *Quinquennial Report of the Director*, which describes the principal achievements and results of PAHO's technical cooperation during the decade that began in 2000, with emphasis on the last five years.

The content of *Health in the Americas* is closely linked to the eight areas of action defined and agreed upon by the Ministers of Health of the Americas in the *Health Agenda for the Americas, 2008–2017*, and thus provides valuable information for documenting the progress made and challenges to be faced in implementing that agenda. In addition, Chapter 1 provides a historical account of public health advances in the Region since the Pan American Health Organization was founded 110 years ago, advances in which the Organization has had an active hand since its inception.

The unifying thread running through this publication is the stark inequality in resources and in the distribution of health and well-being that exist between and within countries of the Americas. The Region presents contrasts and similarities: persistent inequities run alongside a growing social justice movement; age-old diseases coexist with new and urgent problems that have arisen in recent decades. Moreover, the countries face unfinished agendas, achievements that need to be protected, and new vast and unpredictable challenges.

The content of this publication describes and analyzes data that has been generously shared by every country and territory in North America, Latin America, and the Caribbean. If the reader

detects occasional inconsistencies or contradictions in this information, they may arise from chronological discrepancies, methodological inaccuracies, or incomplete data, for which the Secretariat assumes full responsibility.

Finally, we feel we must underline the publication's central message—that each country is a mosaic of circumstances, places, and communities, and that every number, bit of data, and statistic represents the life, health, and hope of a one-of-a-kind person. Each face has a voice; each voice expresses a need; and each need calls for a corresponding action.

I sincerely hope that this edition of *Health in the Americas* will prove useful, interesting, and illustrative of the Region's situation, and that it will spark questions from and unleash reflections in readers, thus contributing to the understanding and improvement of the health and well-being of the peoples of the Americas.

To the health of the New World,

Mirta Roses Periago
Director