EXPANDED PROGRAM ON IMMUNIZATION

The Region of the Americas continues to be a pioneer in the generation of valuable knowledge for and experience in the eradication of vaccine-preventable diseases. Disease-eradication strategies have been one of the main vehicles for developing or boosting vaccination and surveillance capacity in the Region, and have helped pave the way for current vaccination programs. Some notable disease-eradication successes in the Region are the eradication of smallpox and poliomyelitis and, currently, the interruption of indigenous measles transmission.

These achievements have been made possible by the Expanded Program on Immunization (EPI), through the joint efforts of the countries of the Region and international organizations that have supported universal vaccination coverage to lower mortality and morbidity due to vaccine-preventable diseases and are committed to their eradication and control. The diseases targeted by the Program are diphtheria, *Haemophilus influenzae* type b, hepatitis B, measles, pertussis, polio, rubella and congenital rubella syndrome, tetanus, tuberculosis, and yellow fever.

The Immunization Unit of the Pan American Health Organization (PAHO) provides assistance to the countries of the Americas in the following areas:

- the execution of equitable, sustainable vaccination programs;
- the introduction of new vaccines of importance to public health in the Region;
- the strengthening and support of national surveillance systems for vaccine-preventable diseases that operate in conjunction with adequate laboratory support systems, through the expansion of a regional network of diagnostic and quality-control laboratories;
- the promotion of the use of new techniques to improve regional disease surveillance and create electronic networks for reporting suspected cases and providing faster confirmation;
- the timely procurement of vaccines through the PAHO Revolving Fund for Vaccine Procurement to keep costs down and increase the availability of vaccines;
- the periodic evaluation of national vaccination programs by an international team; and
- the preparation of annual and five-year plans of action.

Goals established by the Immunization Unit:

- eliminate rubella and congenital rubella syndrome;
- achieve and maintain 95% vaccination coverage in every municipality for all vaccines;
- maintain polio eradication and measles elimination;
- introduce new and under-utilized vaccines.