

# Universal Health Day, 2021

## Leave no one's health behind: Invest in health systems for all

### High-level virtual meeting

December 10, 2021 14:00 – 15:00 (EST)

### Concept note

COVID-19 has highlighted the inextricable linkages between health, the economy, the environment, and social protection policies and mechanisms. In this context, many countries are experiencing some backsliding in the implementation of the of the Regional Strategy for Universal Access to Health and Universal Health Coverage (Universal Health) and new attention is being given to building resilient health systems, as synergistic and complementary to the Universal Health strategy.

Resilience refers to a system's ability to adjust its activity in order to retain its basic functionality when challenges, failures, and environmental changes occur. It is a defining property of many complex systems. Health system resilience refers to the ability to absorb disturbances and to respond and recover with the timely provision of needed services. It relies on the capacity of health actors, institutions, and populations to prepare for and effectively respond to crises; adapt system components to maintain core functions when a crisis hits; and, informed by monitoring, impact evaluation, and lessons learned, reorganize and transform if conditions require it. Resilience is an attribute of a well-performing health system moving toward universal access to health and universal health coverage.

Experience during the pandemic has made clear that investing to build resilience in health systems is imperative to protect and promote health as well as social and economic development. PAHO will support actions by Member States to accelerate the recuperation and protection of lost public health gains and advance transformation toward more resilient, sustainable, and inclusive health systems during what may be a complex and protracted social and economic crisis in the Americas. This agenda will guide future strategic public investments that will protect and promote health and social and economic development.

In the recent PAHO Directing Council in September 2021, Member States approved the Strategy for building resilient health systems and post-COVID-19 pandemic recovery to sustain and protect public health gains.

In this resolution, 4 strategic lines of action were adopted by Member States to advance this agenda. The first calls on the transformation of health systems, based on a primary health care approach, to accelerate pandemic recovery, recuperate and sustain public health gains, and retake the path toward universal health. The second, proposes to strengthen leadership, stewardship, and governance through a renewed focus on the essential public health functions. The third recommends strengthening capacities of health service delivery networks to expand access and improve preparedness and response to public health emergencies.

Finally, the fourth urges countries to increase and sustain public financing in health and social protection, including actions to address the social, environmental, and economic determinants of health.

Even though the importance of increasing public financing for health in building resilient health systems is highlighted in the last strategic line, we need to recognize the cross-cutting nature of the need for investment in the development of in-country capacities. These capacities - technical, political, and structural in terms of human resources, technology, equipment, and infrastructure for the provision of quality health services- must be strengthened to retake the path towards Universal Health, incorporating lessons learnt from the pandemic. In this regard, the importance of investing in public health interventions as part of the essential public health functions should be considered as a key component of the health policy process.

In this webinar, PAHO is inviting high-level stakeholders to discuss the different dimensions of this agenda, both from the perspective of international organizations supporting health and development in the Americas, and from a country perspective.

## Agenda

**Moderator: James Fitzgerald, Director HSS, Pan American Health Organization**

- **Opening**  
14:00
- **Carissa Etienne, Director, Pan American Health Organization**  
“Transforming health systems based on primary health care: investing to build resilience, now more necessary than ever!”  
14:05-14:15
- **His Excellency Mr. Luis Arce, President, Plurinational State of Bolivia**  
“Strategic public investments to protect and promote health and social and economic development: a tool for advancing health systems transformations for universal health”  
14:15-14:45
- **Jarbas Barbosa, Assistant Director, Pan American Health Organization**  
Closing remarks  
14:45-14:50