

WEBINAR SERIES ON  
ESSENTIAL PUBLIC HEALTH FUNCTIONS  
WEBINAR #2: MONITORING UNIVERSAL HEALTH IN THE ERA OF COVID-19

REPORT

Introduction

On May 18, 2021, the Pan American Health Organization/World Health Organization (PAHO/WHO) held its second webinar that focused on explaining how monitoring and evaluation can strengthen the capacities of health authorities to respond to the health needs of the population.

The webinar series, organized by the Health Services and Access Unit of the Department of Health Systems and Services (HS/HSS), which will run for the rest of the year, aims to share country experiences and lessons learned to strengthen public health functions and achieve an impact on access and population health outcomes.

In this second meeting of the series, approximately 650 people from 42 countries participated and discussed how monitoring and evaluation is a fundamental tool to support the analysis of policy performance, the generation of evidence and decision making aimed at strengthening health systems.

Review of the topics addressed

The seminar was moderated by Dr. Amalia del Riego, Chief of the Health Services and Access Unit of the PAHO/WHO regional headquarters and the participation of 3 speakers James Fitzgerald, Director of the Department of Health Systems and Services, Kathryn O'Neill, Chief of the Health Services Performance Evaluation Unit of the World Health Organization and finally Sebastián García Saisó, Director of the Department of Evidence and Intelligence for Health Action of PAHO.

At the beginning of the session, Dr. del Riego referred to the series on the Essential Functions of Public Health, indicating that *"the objective of this webinar series on the Essential Functions of Public Health is to advance in the region and in each of the countries to achieve Universal Health for all, everywhere"*.

Her remarks also framed the importance of monitoring and evaluation, as it allows for the identification of which health policies perform better and provides the necessary information for decision making and policy development for public health.

Finally, she elaborated on the challenges the Region is facing to achieve universal health, and how monitoring and evaluation can strengthen countries' policies, plans and programs to reach this goal.

In this context, Dr. James Fitzgerald, Director of PAHO's Department of Health Systems and Services presented the [Monitoring Framework for Universal Health in the Americas](#), which is a fundamental tool to support the analysis of policy performance, the generation of evidence and decision making aimed at strengthening health systems. *"The purpose of this document is to establish a framework, based on consensus, that allows for the continuous assessment of progress in the Region towards the achievement of universal health coverage and universal access to health".*

Dr. Fitzgerald elaborated on the monitoring framework, which involved a consensus process with the countries analyzing different analytical frameworks and which took several years of work, with the participation of more than 300 technicians and experts from 20 countries in the region. *"This tool that we are launching will facilitate the efforts that are being made to measure the performance of health systems and will have a feedback process for the generation of evidence, to evaluate the transformation of health systems that are being developed in the region of the Americas".*

This framework offers different dimensions of analysis that Dr. Fitzgerald referred to; strategic actions, outputs, outcomes, and impacts, and one of its main strengths is that it allows a mixed approach to better explain the effect of interventions, with qualitative and quantitative methods.

Finally, he emphasized that the tool, which is already being implemented in some countries, is fully available to the Member States and can be implemented in an integrated manner with PAHO's technical cooperation in order to move toward universal health in the Region of the Americas.

Kathryn O'Neill, Unit Head of the Health Services Performance Assessment Unit of the World Health Organization (WHO), referred to the launching of the Framework for Measuring and Monitoring Primary Health Care Performance, which allows countries to perform an analysis aimed at facilitating decision making and improving PHC performance. *"This tool provides a focus on critical areas that are usually underdeveloped in health systems".*

To begin, she commented that this tool arises from the most recent resolution of the World Health Assembly on PHC, and that it is part of the agenda of the Astana Declaration. Among its main objectives are *"to support the monitoring of progress in strengthening PHC in the context of universal health coverage, to strengthen the capacities of countries to monitor progress in improving PHC performance and, finally, to align PHC monitoring with national and global monitoring frameworks for universal health coverage and the SDGs".*

She specified in particular that a list of indicators has been proposed to plan, focus and monitor key actions and interventions for the strengthening of PHC-oriented systems and that these can be adapted to each country according to its policies, priorities and health system, as well as to establish a baseline to set national targets for PHC.

In the next presentation of the webinar, Dr. Sebastián García Saisó, Director of PAHO's Department of Evidence and Intelligence for Action in Health, provided some views on the impact of the HIV/AIDS pandemic on the social determinants of health and equity in the Americas and discussed the main challenges facing the Region.

He referred to available data on inequality gradients in Brazil, where the lowest income quintile has had a higher prevalence of COVID 19 infection, as well as race and ethnicity, or what has happened in Colombia, where the uninsured population has a lower survival rate compared to those with formal health insurance.

Dr. Garcia Saisó emphasized how inequities have deepened during the Pandemic and based on these facts, he recommended that policy makers *"recognize the primacy of the principle of equity as a central role in social decision making, the identity of peoples, institutions and the promotion of population health"*.

He concluded by reflecting on the relevance of having tools that allow the measurement of results to make decisions: *"The road to 2030 is now a post-pandemic road and, consequently, society as a whole must review and rethink its priorities to build resilient systems and combat future pandemics. In this post-pandemic future, health policy accountability for pro-equity decisions and actions will be better informed if guided by explicit and measurable targets"*.

#### Key Messages

The speakers included in their presentations elements that have highlighted the importance of monitoring and evaluation, which allow us to understand which health system policies work and which do not, in addition to providing the necessary information for decision making and the development of public health policies.

In her final remarks, Dr. Amalia del Riego summarized some of these messages:

First, the centrality of strengthening capacities for monitoring and evaluation to measure the performance of health systems, *"which must always be oriented towards universal health and equity"*.

Second, presentations were made on the challenges the Region is facing to achieve universal health in the context of a pandemic, and how monitoring and evaluation is becoming more relevant to strengthen the capacity of health authorities to respond to the needs of the population.

In this regard, she stressed that universal health requires the strengthening of the health system's intelligence capabilities, i.e., analysis of the health situation of the population's health, evaluation and monitoring of the performance of health systems.

Third, that these analytical frameworks offer a number of opportunities for integrating them jointly into plans, strategies and policy review processes in the countries of the region of the Americas and, above all, that their adoption by health authorities at different levels strengthens national and sub-national capacities for health information analysis, communication and accountability.

In closing the seminar, Del Riego called for *"using these tools to advance the development of policies, programs and practices based on equity in order to close the gaps"*.

The series of webinars on EPHF continues in July with the third activity dedicated to "policy development", with the aim of deepening the debate on the processes of policy formulation with a comprehensive and integrative perspective that includes individual, collective and social determinants of health, and an analysis that allows to recognize the progress and challenges of legislative and regulatory frameworks that facilitate this approach with a perspective of health as a fundamental human right.

## References

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