

# Bulletin of the Mental Health, Substance Abuse and Rehabilitation Unit



**December 2006**

Unit Team

**Dr. Jorge Rodriguez**

Unit Chief

(Washington, D.C.)

[rodrigo@paho.org](mailto:rodrigo@paho.org)

**Dr. Maristela Monteiro**

Regional Adviser on Alcohol and  
Substance Abuse (Washington, D.C.)

[monteirm@paho.org](mailto:monteirm@paho.org)

**Dr. Hugo Cohen**

Sub-regional Adviser on Mental  
Health for South America (Argentina)

[cohenh@arg.ops-oms.org](mailto:cohenh@arg.ops-oms.org)

**Dr. Victor Aparicio**

Sub-regional Adviser on Mental  
Health for Mexico, Central America,  
and the Hispanic Caribbean  
(Panama)

[apariciv@pan.ops-oms.org](mailto:apariciv@pan.ops-oms.org)

**Dr. Armando Vásquez**

Regional Adviser on Rehabilitation  
(Santiago, Chile)

[vasqueza@chi.ops-oms.org](mailto:vasqueza@chi.ops-oms.org)

**Mr. Javier Vásquez**

Human Rights Specialist  
Legal Affairs Area / Technology and  
Health Services Delivery Area  
(Washington, D.C.)

[vasquezj@paho.org](mailto:vasquezj@paho.org)

**Ms. Janis Dawson-Schwartzman**

Consultant  
Alcohol and Substance Abuse  
(Washington, D.C.)

[dawsonja@paho.org](mailto:dawsonja@paho.org)

Secretariat:

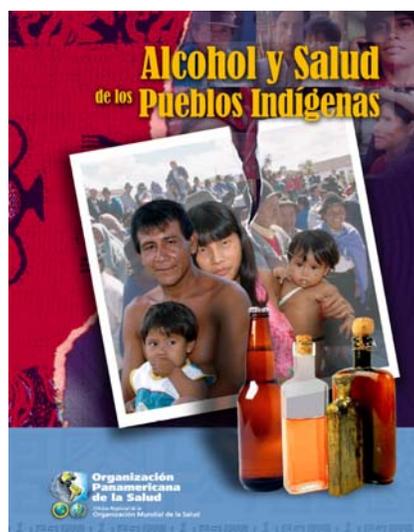
**Mrs. Amalia Paredes**

[paredama@paho.org](mailto:paredama@paho.org)

**Mrs. Martha Koev**

[koevmart@paho.org](mailto:koevmart@paho.org)

The Mental Health, Substance Abuse and Rehabilitation Unit of the Pan American Health Organization / World Health Organization (PAHO/WHO), is pleased to send you a new issue of its Bulletin. The purpose of this publication is to communicate important advances, news, and information on publications in the fields of mental health, the control of alcohol and substance abuse, rehabilitation, and the international protection of human rights. The main objectives of the Unit are to strengthen the countries' capacity to develop mental health policies, plans, programs, and services; formulate public policies for the control of alcohol abuse; prevent disabilities and achieve equal opportunities for people with disabilities; and promote and protect the human rights and fundamental liberties of people with disabilities and their families. In this issue, the bulletin highlights advances in the promotion and protection of the human rights of people with mental illness.



## Report of Alcohol and Health of the Indigenous Peoples

The most significant consequences of alcohol consumption in indigenous communities are associated with health problems, social harm, and the destruction of indigenous culture and values. However, the degree of alcohol consumption and its impact are still, for the most part, unknown, and existing policies are not directed at this particular vulnerable population.

Not enough is known about what can be done to reduce the social and health problems related to alcohol consumption in these communities, what resources do exist in the communities in order to face this problem, and what policies would work. For these reasons, the Alcohol and Health of the Indigenous Peoples Project was put into practice by the Pan

American Health Organization in collaboration with Health Canada. Nicaragua, Bolivia, Mexico, Panama, and Canada participated in this effort.

The project began with a bibliographic review of the problems related to alcohol consumption and the responses among the indigenous populations in the developing countries of the Region. The purpose of this review was to identify the existing responses of the communities in the selected countries, documenting (as case studies), evaluating, and consolidating these experiences in a manual to be disseminated among the indigenous communities. The manual provides tools to identify and respond to problems specific to the community, offering solutions that have shown results in similar communities.

Each participating country prepared a case study that reflected the issues surrounding alcohol consumption: the origins of alcohol consumption in their communities, how it was used and

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how it is currently used, how the communities have been affected by the arrival of new alcoholic beverages, what is the availability of alcohol, and how the problems associated with its use have increased over time.

To receive a copy of the report, please contact the alcohol and substance abuse program: [asabuse@paho.org](mailto:asabuse@paho.org).

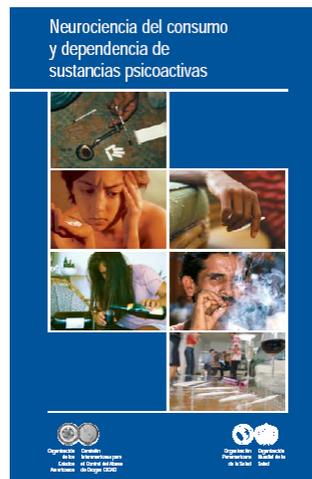
## Neuroscience of Consumption and Dependency of Psychoactive Substances

Drawing on knowledge gained in the past 20 to 30 years, the WHO seeks to provide a general and complete description of the biological and biochemical factors related to the use and dependency on psychoactive substances in its book on the neuroscience of addictions. In addition, the book highlights the action mechanisms of different types of psychoactive substances and explains the forms in which their use can trigger the dependency syndrome. Although the book is focused on the cerebral mechanisms of the neurotransmitters, it also examines the social and environmental factors that influence the use and dependency of the substances and the ethical implications new biological interventions.

The translation and distribution of this book in Latin America will increase availability and reach studies in Spanish and allow for greater comprehension of the biochemical effects of drugs consumption. It is also intended to raise awareness among the political sector, judicial systems, social protection, coordinating agencies, health professionals, educators, and the general population.

Although a great deal remains to be investigated in the area of substances use and dependency, this book expands the knowledge regarding the nature of addictions and potential application of this knowledge for the development of more adequate policies.

The translation and distribution in Spanish has been possible thanks to the joint effort between the Pan American Health Organization, Regional Office of the World Health Organization (PAHO/WHO), the Inter-American Drug Abuse Control Commission of the Organization of American States (CICAD/OAS), and to the Basque Observatory of Drug-dependencies in Spain that has reproduced 1,500 copies this year.



We believe in the importance of the content of this book, based on scientific evidence regarding substances use and dependency, which will make it possible to establish a greater commitment from the Ministries of Health, the National Commissions on Drugs, the normative entities, scientists, educators, health professionals, and students in order to respond more adequately to problems relating to substance use within the public health area.

If you would like a copy of the book please contact the alcohol and substance abuse program: [asabuse@paho.org](mailto:asabuse@paho.org).

## Development of policies, plans, services, and legislation on mental health

City of Panama, Panama

Between November 29<sup>th</sup> and December 1<sup>st</sup>, 2006, a workshop on the technical cooperation project between Panama and Cuba about the "Development of Policies, Plans, Services, and Legislation of Mental Health" took place in the City of Panamá, Panamá took place. Thirteen Panamanian professionals and two Cuban professionals participated in the meeting, along with the technical support from PAHO. During the workshop, an analysis of the mental health services of both countries was carried out with special attention to the issues specific to this collaboration project, the Panamanian experience in issues of alcohol and other substances abuse, and the Cuban experience in the development of child-juvenile mental health services. In addition, a presentation of was made about the local health services where the pilot project for the organization of mental health services centered in a primary health care model will be carried out . Cuba has selected the municipal area of La Lisa, and Panama has selected the health region of San Miguelito and Chilibre. These activities should allow both countries to strengthen their mental health policy.

## Assessment Instrument for Mental Health Systems (IEMS-WHO)

Central America and the Hispanic Caribbean

Honduras has recently initiated the process to administer the Assessment Instrument for Mental Health Systems (IEMS-WHO). The Dominican Republic has just finalized data collection using this instrument and is in the process of writing the final report. Previously, the IEMS-WHO has been carried out in Guatemala, El Salvador, Nicaragua, and Panama; as a result, these countries are already prepared to initiate the processes to reformulate their Mental Health policies.

For more information about this instrument, please visit: [www.who.int/mental\\_health/evidence/WHO-AIMS/en/](http://www.who.int/mental_health/evidence/WHO-AIMS/en/)

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## Study associates antidepressant medicines with greater risk in suicide attempts but lower risk of suicide consummation

Individuals with suicidal tendencies who are under antidepressant medication seem to run a greater risk of additional suicide attempts, but a lower risk of being successful in the act, according to a broad Finnish study, published in the Journals of the American Medical Association - JAMA.

Recently, the relationship between the use of antidepressants, especially selective serotonin reuptake inhibitors (SSRI), and suicidal ideation and behaviors has received considerable public attention. The use of such drugs among adolescents has been the subject of special concern.

The entire information on this report can be found at:

<http://jama.ama-assn.org/cgi/content/full/292/3/338?maxtoshow=&HITS=10&hits=10&RESULTFORMAT=&fulltext=Antidepressants+&searchid=1&FIRSTINDEX=0&resourcetype=HWCIT>

## Improved Care for Depression can be profitable for employers

Offering additional care against depression can save money to employers, as a cost-benefit and profitability analysis published in December in General Psychiatry, one of the publications of the Journals of the American Medical Association – JAMA.

In addition to its cost in health and patient welfare, depression is estimated to cost billions of dollars in the United States every year, according to the article. The majority of these costs are related to the productivity reduced in the workplace. The data indicates that currently available treatments and screening methods could reduce these costs, but at the same time remain underutilized.

<http://jama.ama-assn.org/cgi/content/abstract/273/1/51?maxtoshow=&HITS=10&hits=10&RESULTFORMAT=&fulltext=Enhanced+Depression+Care+May+Be+Cost-Effective+for+Employers%2C++Wang&searchid=1&FIRSTINDEX=0&resourcetype=HWCIT>

### Links to other sources of information and activities

**The Spanish Association of Neuropsychiatry** – Mental Health Professionals – Offers freely several of its publications such as the Journal of the Spanish Association of Neuropsychiatry, the North of Mental Health, and Notebooks of Community Psychiatry, among others at its official website: <http://www.asoc-aen.es/aAW/web/cas/index.jsp>

**World Association of Psychiatry** – Bulletin November 2006:

<http://www.wpanet.org/home.html>

Supplement II of the **Brazilian Journal of Psychiatry**:

[http://www.scielo.br/scielo.php/script\\_sci\\_serial/pid\\_1516-4446/Ing\\_pt/nrm\\_iso](http://www.scielo.br/scielo.php/script_sci_serial/pid_1516-4446/Ing_pt/nrm_iso)