



**Pan American
Health
Organization**



**World Health
Organization**
REGIONAL OFFICE FOR THE
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66th SESSION OF THE REGIONAL COMMITTEE OF WHO FOR THE AMERICAS

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**OPENING REMARKS BY HON. SYLVIA MATHEWS BURWELL
SECRETARY OF HEALTH AND HUMAN SERVICES,
DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH AND HUMAN SERVICES
OF THE UNITED STATES OF AMERICA**

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**53rd Directing Council of PAHO
66th Session of the WHO Regional Committee for the Americas**

Thank you, Minister Vance, for your leadership as President of the Directing Council.

Distinguished Ministers, Delegates, ladies and gentlemen ...Good morning.

I'm honored to be here today with so many Ministers and leaders from our Region ... and glad to welcome you to Washington.

I want to thank PAHO, under the leadership of Dr. Carissa Etienne for convening this meeting to address pressing issues that impact the health of people across the Americas. I look forward to continuing our long tradition of partnership with you.

I would also like to acknowledge the service of Deputy Director Jon Andrus, who has served PAHO with passion and dedication for the past 15 years. On behalf of the United States, thank you for all you have done to improve the health and lives of the people of our region.

Today, we face many shared challenges: from the unexpected, epidemics like Ebola ... to the rise of non-communicable disease ... to providing people across the region with access to quality, affordable health care.

Ebola

I'll start with Ebola. There is little chance of an outbreak happening here, but the situation in West Africa reminds us how swiftly outbreaks occur; of the disruption they

cause to our increasingly interconnected global economy; and of the devastation they bring in terms of human lives lost.

This epidemic underscores the importance of fully implementing the International Health Regulations, so that we can strengthen our ability to detect outbreaks early and effectively communicate and rapidly confront these threats together.

While we've made significant progress building on our core capacities as a region, there's still more to do.

This past February, we came together with international partners to launch the Global Health Security Agenda, committing ourselves to working together across sectors to accelerate IHR capacity building *and* to mobilize support to prevent, detect, and respond to outbreaks.

Several countries in this region have already committed to new or expanded efforts through the Global Health Security Agenda. And we're hopeful others will join us.

But even as we work to address global health challenges like Ebola and the rise of Dengue Fever and Chikungunya, we're reminded that our health care systems, and our global economy, are tested not only by outbreaks and epidemics, but by systemic disparities and inequalities that all of us have a stake in addressing.

Obesity Prevention

So in addition to challenges posed by infectious disease, we must address the threats to social and economic development posed by chronic conditions and non-communicable diseases, like obesity. The Caribbean community, in particular, is leading on this issue.

The evidence tells us the most effective way to reduce obesity is to intervene during childhood.

Here in the United States, the First Lady's *Let's Move!* initiative shows that multi-sector approaches deliver results in reducing obesity rates.

We also recognize that more work needs to be done across sectors and across our region to combat other chronic and infectious diseases, including HIV/AIDS, cholera, pandemic influenza, and heart disease.

Affordable Care Act

Much of this work begins with prevention and wellness.

So before closing, I'd like to turn quickly to another priority that we all share, and that's making sure that all people, across the region, have access to quality, affordable health insurance.

In the United States, we've created a new Health Insurance Marketplace where insurers compete to offer quality, affordable coverage to consumers. The Marketplace opened for business last October, and in its first year, we reduced the number of uninsured adults in our country by 10.3 million people.

And at the same time, we're focused on innovation and reforming our delivery system so that we spend health care dollars more wisely, while ensuring patients receive higher-quality care.

Our health reform efforts in the United States were, and continue to be, influenced by lessons learned from other nations. We have much to learn from each other's successes and from each other's challenges.

Conclusion

As we move forward in the spirit of collective action that is embodied by PAHO—and as we work together to address these and other challenges—I'm confident our efforts will not only deliver results for people across the Region, but ultimately, a safer, healthier world to future generations.

Thank you.
