



**Pan American  
Health  
Organization**



**World Health  
Organization**  
Americas Region

**62nd Directing Council  
77th Session of the Regional Committee of WHO  
for the Americas**  
Washington, D.C., 29 September–3 October 2025

CD62/DIV/1

Original: English/Spanish

**WELCOMING REMARKS BY DR. JARBAS BARBOSA DA SILVA JR.,  
DIRECTOR OF THE PAN AMERICAN SANITARY BUREAU  
AND REGIONAL DIRECTOR OF THE WORLD HEALTH ORGANIZATION FOR THE AMERICAS**

**29 September 2025**

Honorable Dr. María Teresa Barán, Minister of Health of Paraguay, Outgoing President of the Directing Council;

Honorable Mr. Jim O'Neill, Deputy Secretary of Health and Human Services of the United States of America;

Honorable Mr. Albert R. Ramdin, Secretary General of the Organization of American States;

Honorable Mrs. Amanda Glassman, Executive Advisor to the President of the Inter-American Development Bank;

Honorable Dr. Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus, Director-General of the World Health Organization;

Distinguished Ministers of Health, Ambassadors, delegations, and colleagues,

It is my honor to welcome you to the 62nd Session of the Directing Council of the Pan American Health Organization (PAHO).

Let us remind ourselves that our partnership began in 1902 right here in Washington, D.C., when 11 countries came together and founded the International Sanitary Bureau, known today as the Pan American Sanitary Bureau (PASB). The main assigned functions of this new Bureau included:

1. To urge each Republic to promptly and regularly transmit to the Bureau all data relative to the sanitary conditions of their respective ports and territories;
2. To obtain all possible aid for a thorough, careful, and scientific study and investigation of any outbreaks of pestilential disease which may occur in any of the said Republics;
3. To lend its best aid and experience toward the widest possible protection of the public health of each of the republics in order that disease may be eliminated and that commerce between the said Republics may be facilitated.

More than a century later, that partnership has grown to include 35 Member States, four Associate Members, and three Participating States represented here today—a powerful sign of continued collective commitment to the health, security, and prosperity of the Americas.

Countries in the Americas have long worked together to address regional health security. Such collaboration is essential for disease prevention, public health resilience, economic stability, and

a viable workforce. A unified approach to health security will enhance regional preparedness for current and future health crises and contribute to broader objectives such as socio-economic development and sustainable prosperity. History has shown that proactive preparation for health crises, including building resilient health systems and capacities for prevention, early detection, and rapid response, can save countless lives and reduce the socio-economic impacts of epidemics.

The following highlights key elements to strengthening health security within a dynamic public health approach.

Epidemics and pandemics can endanger lives and disrupt trade, travel, tourism, and food supply networks, leading to significant economic losses. The COVID-19 pandemic caused global GDP to shrink by 3.5% in 2020, underscoring the role that health security plays in national stability, economic resilience, and the protection of populations.

Effective early detection of health threats is a cornerstone of health security. Annually, more than 2.4 million public health signals are analyzed here in PASB, and approximately 160 public health events are detected in the Americas. Half of these are classified as acute public health events of potential international concern. Detecting and containing biothreats at their source and improving emergency response constitutes the first line of defense to stop outbreaks and requires a whole-of-government approach.

In many instances, our Region was the first to achieve these milestones, demonstrating to countries around the world what is possible when political will, innovation, and collaboration combine in the interest of public health.

In the case of infectious diseases, we have been able to sustain much of our progress over time, despite our social and economic differences, and the emergence of dangerous new pathogens.

We have the opportunity to eliminate many infectious diseases that threaten our Region. Imagine what would be possible if our countries were free of malaria, and if women and girls lived without the threat of cervical cancer, which claims the lives of 44 000 women every year in our Region. It is important to emphasize that disease elimination is a time-limited investment, not an eternal expense, making it one of the smartest ways to invest limited resources. Leading the way in disease elimination is part of our Region's legacy, and it must remain a shared priority for our future.

As the world evolves and becomes more complex, so do the threats to our public health. In order to face this moment, new approaches are required that maximize resources and leverage innovation. This also means updating our agenda to prioritize diseases that pose an increasing threat to our lives and livelihoods.

Noncommunicable diseases must be among the top priorities for our Region. These diseases affect people living in North America, Central America, South America, and the Caribbean with impacts on the economy and social development. They impact families, communities, and countries, with an unacceptable burden of premature and preventable deaths.

Well-established ways to address this crisis range from reducing risk factors such as the consumption of tobacco, alcohol, and ultra-processed foods to increasing healthy eating and physical activity.

Our health systems must continue to adapt by responding to this reality with strong primary care systems and by advancing with strategies and technologies that accelerate and universalize the many accomplishments our Region has already achieved.

Closing this gap is fundamental to PAHO's mission and we are committed to continuing our support for all Member States to achieve the shared goal of addressing noncommunicable diseases through technical cooperation based on the best available evidence and on expanded access to health technologies.

The legacy of health leadership in our Region has always been driven by cooperation and solidarity. The reason PAHO exists is to leverage the Region's experience and resources to safeguard the health and prosperity of each Member State.

Our Region works together in countless ways, and I am proud to see the results we are achieving, which I will present in the annual report I will share with you today.

Pan-americanism, which motivated the creation of PAHO over a century ago, remains our core value and translates into concrete actions and initiatives today. To conclude, I would like to highlight three initiatives that I believe are fundamental to our future:

1. First, we share a robust surveillance and response system that tracks threats in real-time, transparently shares information with all our Member States, and enables countries to respond quickly and more efficiently to outbreaks and emergencies.
2. Second, our Regional Revolving Funds allow us to pool resources across all countries in Latin America and the Caribbean, expanding access to vaccines, medicines, diagnostics, and other supplies at affordable prices. This mechanism is essential for protecting the health of our populations and it supports the development of production capacity for vaccines, medicines, and health technologies in the Region of the Americas.
3. Third is our countries' joint effort to maintain the Region as a global leader in health: in the elimination of communicable diseases, in the reduction of avoidable deaths from noncommunicable diseases, in the strengthening of primary health care, and in digital transformation. Our achievements inspire other regions of the world in the pursuit of universal health.

The future of our Region's health and security will not be determined by what we talk about this week. It will be determined by how quickly our words become policies that countries can implement to protect their people; by how we react to the unexpected challenges that will surely arise; and above all, by our solidarity and our willingness to work together to ensure that our Region keeps pace with a rapidly changing world.

As Director of PAHO, I want to unequivocally affirm that this Organization is at your service, as a trusted ally committed to building a better future.

Thank you very much. Muchas gracias. Muito obrigado. Merci beaucoup.

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