
PAHO DIRECTOR'S OPENING CEREMONY REMARKS
AMERICAN PUBLIC HEALTH ASSOCIATION (APHA)
2025 ANNUAL MEETING & EXPO
2 NOVEMBER 2025

Theme: *Solidarity in Action: Health security is our shared responsibility, and together, we can build a safer, healthier future for all.*

Welcome

Esteemed Dr. Georges Benjamin, distinguished colleagues, and honorable guests,

It is my great privilege to join you for the Opening Ceremony of the American Public Health Association's 2025 Annual Meeting and Exposition.

This is a fitting place to gather and reaffirm our shared commitment to advancing public health in the United States, across the Americas, and beyond.

I thank Dr. Ayanna Bennett for her kind introduction and commend Dr. Georges Benjamin, Dr. Deanna Wathington, and the entire American Public Health Association for convening this extraordinary gathering of public health professionals, researchers, policymakers, and advocates.

Setting the Stage: Health Security for National Prosperity

In 1902, more than a century ago, right here in Washington, the United States leadership brought together representatives from 11 countries of the Region of the Americas to found the International Sanitary Bureau, known today as the Pan American Health Organization or PAHO.

The mandate of this organization was clear: to protect the health and prosperity of our people and foster cooperation across borders.

That moment marked the start of a lasting partnership between the United States and the countries of the Americas to protect and promote health across our hemisphere and through PAHO, leaving no one behind.

Today, that partnership has grown to include thirty-five Member States, three Participating States, and four Associated States united by a common purpose—health, security, and prosperity for the Americas.

The theme of this year's APHA annual meeting, "Making the Public's Health a National Priority," resonates deeply with the mission of the Pan American Health Organization.

Health security across the region starts when each country prioritizes their public's health and pursues essential collaboration for disease prevention, resilient and strong health systems, and a viable workforce. A successful approach to health security will proactively prepare for crises and contribute to broader objectives such as socio-economic development and sustainable prosperity. Success also requires that countries work across borders in support of this vision.

Health is the foundation of security, economic stability, and social resilience.

When health systems falter, economies suffer, security may be impacted, and communities are left vulnerable. In 2020, at the most acute phase of the COVID-19 pandemic, global GDP shrank by 3.5% — a stark reminder that health is inseparable from security, prosperity, and development.

Data-Driven Progress

Countries in the Americas have long recognized that protecting our people's health requires trust,

collaboration, and an evidence and data-driven approach.

PAHO helps enable this collaboration through our regional surveillance and response systems, which track threats in real time, share information transparently, and position countries to respond quickly and efficiently to health threats.

Each year, PAHO analyzes more than 2.4 million public health signals in the Americas and detects approximately 160 public health events — half of which are classified as acute events of potential international concern. Strong surveillance is our first line of defense to stop outbreaks.

We are also seeing diseases once confined to other regions of the Americas — including dengue, Chagas, and chikungunya — emerging in parts of the United States.

Together, we not only have the tools to stop emerging risks, but we have the power to eliminate many infectious diseases that have threatened our Region for too long.

Disease elimination is a time-limited investment with lasting returns. Leading the way in disease elimination is part of the Americas' legacy — we were the first region in the world to eliminate smallpox in 1974 and polio in 1994.

It must remain a shared priority for our future.

Imagine an Americas free from malaria, or a place where women and girls are no longer threatened by cervical cancer. Right now, we have an opportunity to eliminate these and other diseases, and PAHO is committed to acting on it.

The Power of Collective Action

As the world evolves, so do threats to public health.

While we continue to confront infectious diseases, there is another, fast-rising challenge – noncommunicable diseases such as heart disease, cancer, and diabetes, which quietly but persistently impact millions across the Americas.

Noncommunicable diseases have risen by more than 40% in the Americas since 2000. By 2050, untreated noncommunicable diseases could cost the region up to 4% of GDP due to lost productivity and rising healthcare costs. 35.2% of the population in the Americas faces unmet healthcare needs, with rates exceeding 40% in lower-middle-income countries.

Tackling the dual burden of infectious and noncommunicable diseases, including mental health, requires, above all, strong primary health care systems to address the persistent gaps in care. Access to diagnostics, treatment, and digital tools is essential.

Closing this gap is core to PAHO's mission and a priority of our work, from technical assistance to procurement.

Our Regional Revolving Funds allow us to pool resources to expand access to high-quality vaccines, medicines, diagnostics, and other supplies at affordable prices, which helps protect our populations and promotes local production capacity.

It's a perfect example of countries collaborating to advance solutions together.

Each experience PAHO has built across the Americas holds lessons that can inform and strengthen public health here in the United States as well. That is the essence of regional cooperation and true health security: the capacity to learn, adapt, and advance together.

Call to Action and Closing

In looking over the agenda for this year's meeting, I was struck by the volume of critical topics to

cover and the amount of hard work ahead of us.

At the same time, I was encouraged that the APHA – a collective built on more than 153 years of scientific expertise, credibility, and devotion to public health – will be driving conversation and innovating to develop solutions.

The APHA includes among its core values the words community, health equity, and fortitude. These values happen to be foundational to the idea of Pan Americanism, which was a motivation for the creation of PAHO.

Pan Americanism is grounded in the belief that prioritizing the health, prosperity, and security of each nation benefits our entire Region. And that only by working together, in solidarity, across nations, and even towns, can we overcome the gravest threats to our societies.

I am honored to participate in this year's annual meeting and look forward to the opportunity to meet and collaborate with many of the people in this room.

You can be assured that PAHO will approach the next few days with a spirit of community, a commitment to health for all, and the fortitude to persevere and build a healthier, brighter future for the Region of the Americas, for our families and our communities.

Let's make this week a celebration of what unites us and a commitment to what drives us: **Health for All, Together, for the Americas.**

Thank you.

Dr. Jarbas Barbosa