

## 16<sup>th</sup> National Health Conference: Democracy and Health

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The 16<sup>th</sup> National Health Conference was the largest social participation event held so far in Brazil. Over 5 thousand people attended the Conference, including health council members, social movement representatives, National Health System (SUS) users, workers and managers, gathered in Brasília, DF, between August 4<sup>th</sup> and 7<sup>th</sup> 2019. This impressive event was organized by the National Health Council and sponsored by the Ministry of Health.

Its theme, “Democracy and Health,” and the reference to “8<sup>th</sup>+8” recall the historic 8<sup>th</sup> National Health Conference, held in 1986. The 8<sup>th</sup> Conference was the first national event with social participation in the field of health. Its final report<sup>1</sup> recommended the creation of a national health system, separate from the retirement system. It also resulted in the setting up of the National Health Reform Commission (CNRS),<sup>2</sup> which played a determining role in the preparation of the proposal that culminated in the inclusion of the right to health and the establishment of the SUS in the 1988 Federal Constitution.<sup>3</sup>

Over 4,600 conferences, totaling approximately 1 million participants, held in all the Brazilian states and the Federal District, preceded the 16<sup>th</sup> National Health Conference. Contributions to the debate were also provided by 63 free conferences, organized independently by health worker institutions, service users, higher education institutions, forums and by municipal and state-level health service managers.

The 16<sup>th</sup> Conference Consolidated National Report<sup>4</sup> synthesized the best positions and guidance for defending and strengthening SUS, improving the population’s health conditions and building healthier and more democratic relations in the health sector and in society as a whole. The proposals were organized into three tracks: I – Health as a right; II – Consolidation of SUS principles; and III – Adequate and sufficient funding for the SUS.

The debates that took place during the 16<sup>th</sup> National Health Conference (NHC) culminated in the approval of 31 guidelines and 329 proposals originating from all the country’s states and its Federal District, as well as 56 motions which were included in the Final Report.<sup>5</sup>

The 16<sup>th</sup> NHC was a paramount moment for Brazilian democracy and for the SUS. The event recalled and reechoed the speech of Sergio Arouca, Chairman of the 8<sup>th</sup> NHC and protagonist of the creation of the SUS:

that [people] have the right to housing, to work, to a decent wage, to water, to clothing, to education, to information on how to rule the world over the world and transform it. (...) to an environment that is not aggressive towards them and which, on the contrary, enables a dignified and decent life. (...) to a political system that respects a people’s freedom of opinion and freedom of organization and self-determination, rather than being continually submitted to fear of violence, the type of violence that results from poverty, that results in robbery, in attacks. Nor should it be submitted to fear of violence of a government against its own people, in order to maintain interests that are not the interests of the people.<sup>6</sup>

The magnitude of the 16<sup>th</sup> National Health Conference reflects the greatness and the power of the SUS which, although it still faces challenges to fully achieving its principles, is unquestionably a heritage of the Brazilian population and, therefore, must be preserved and strengthened.

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