

The Pan American Health Organization: 120 years promoting public health in the Region of the Americas

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In 2022, the Pan American Health Organization (PAHO) celebrated its 120th anniversary. As I look back over the years and the history of this Organization, I am reminded of the power and importance of solidarity to build a healthier, and more hopeful and fairer future.

Over the past three years, the Region of the Americas was forced to confront one of the toughest crises faced in over a century. The Region was especially hard hit by the COVID-19 pandemic, which profoundly affected all areas of our lives and set back years of social and economic progress. However, even when the obstacles were insurmountable, our Region worked together to vaccinate more than 700 million people. Today, countries and territories across the Americas are addressing existing gaps in our health systems, strengthening disease surveillance, and expanding manufacturing capacities to ensure a better preparation for future challenges.

Over the past decades, I have witnessed Member States work in partnership to eliminate measles, rubella, and neonatal tetanus. Great strides have been achieved in the Region in the elimination of mother-to-child transmission of HIV and syphilis, malaria, human rabies transmitted by dogs, onchocerciasis, leprosy, and trachoma. Our countries have enacted laws and policies to curb tobacco usage, slow rates of obesity, and address our growing mental health crisis. Together we confronted epidemics of Zika virus and chikungunya, outbreaks of cholera and yellow fever, and periodic surges of flu and dengue.

Time and time again, I have found that the key to overcoming our Region's health challenges is through taking collective actions to find solutions. This requires maintaining close partnerships across country governments and health systems, and openly sharing data, advice, and expertise.

Perhaps no other instrument represents the values of regional solidarity better than our *Pan American Journal of Public Health*, which celebrated its centennial in 2022. For 100 years, the Journal has been a critical instrument to advance public health in the

Americas. It has been our Region's leading platform to disseminate and diffuse evidence, guidance and lessons, furthering the ability of public health experts and scientists to improve the health of our societies.

Since May 1922, the Journal has been an invaluable source of information on the state of regional health programs, a platform to announce progress in the field of health, research, prevention, and cure of diseases, and a tool for presenting the responses of Member States to the mandates and actions, of PAHO and its Governing Bodies.

PAHO's history is reflected in this Journal. Its articles and special issues faithfully present each era's health situation and priorities. In its early editions, we can observe the evolution of public health in action as countries were just beginning to build their health systems, enact sanitary laws, and pilot national health programs.

The Journal tells the tales of diseases – many unresolved – that have shaped the course of our Region over time: from communicable diseases such as diphtheria, leprosy, and tuberculosis, to cardiovascular disease, cancer, diabetes, and issues like smoking, traffic accidents, violence and climate change that have gained prominence and continue to command regional interest.

A major focus for the Journal and for the Americas over the last 45 years has been our collective goal of achieving universal health care. Emblazoned in the pages of our Journal is the Alma-Ata Declaration of 1978, a transformational guide that defined primary health care as the essential strategy to achieve our goal of Health for All.

Indeed, the essence of Alma-Ata remains alive in the Journal's pages – whether in its coverage of maternal and child mortality, immunization or basic science. Universal health remains a vital thread for PAHO's work, including in its most recent Sustainable Health Agenda for the Americas 2018-2030.

Look no further than the COVID-19 pandemic to witness the importance of strengthening our primary health care systems.

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Strong primary health care systems help countries to detect outbreaks faster and to prevent and respond to health emergencies more efficiently and equitably. Strong primary health systems get us closer to achieving our universal health care goals and help us build more resilient populations, societies, and economies.

As we look ahead to the next 100 years, I am confident the Journal will maintain its crucial role of updating and renewing knowledge and documenting and promoting public health actions that benefit our Region. By harnessing the lessons and expertise found in the pages of our Journal, we can build a society free of inequality in which everyone, especially the most

vulnerable and disadvantaged, are able to lead healthy, meaningful, and fruitful lives.

I commend the contributors and editors of the *Pan American Journal of Public Health*, for advancing the health and well-being of the peoples of the Americas and for promoting our regional values of health, equity, solidarity, and social justice.

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