

# PAHO



Pan American  
Health  
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REGIONAL OFFICE FOR THE  
AMERICAS

## News release

### **PAHO Director, Ministers of Health of the Americas discuss renewed focus on Primary Health Care**

*High-level dialogue to mark World Health Day seeks to motivate action to sustainably address the Region's health challenges by strengthening first level of care*

# Health For All



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**Washington, DC, 5 April 2023 (PAHO)** – The Director of the Pan American Health Organization (PAHO), Dr. Jarbas Barbosa, participated in a high-level dialogue with Ministers of Health and other health leaders of the Americas to discuss ways to strengthen and transform health systems in the region, using the Primary Health Care approach, to face current challenges and prepare for future health emergencies.

The event, *Health for all: Strengthening primary healthcare to build resilient systems*, took place today as part of the World Health Day commemorations and to honor the World Health Organization on the 75th anniversary of its creation.

The PAHO Director was joined by Dr. Nisia Trindade Lima, Minister of Health of Brazil, Dr. Frank C.S. Anthony, Minister of Health of Guyana, Dr. Francisco Alabi, Minister of Health of El Salvador, Juan Núñez Guadarrama, Coordinator, México Salud-Hable Coalition, and Dr. Jaime Urrego, Vice minister of Public Health, Colombia.

During the dialogue, Dr. Barbosa highlighted some of the achievements in primary care in the Americas over the past decades, including an increase in life expectancy, the eradication of endemic transmission of measles, rubella and congenital rubella, and a reduction in infant mortality.

Despite this progress, however, low levels of investment, fragmented health systems and limited response capacity at the first level of care mean that barriers to access health remain, disproportionately affecting the most vulnerable.

The COVID-19 pandemic has also “exposed, exacerbated, and created structural health system challenges” that have further deepened inequalities and affected response capacity and results in the field of public health, the Director said.

“We aspire to develop and achieve health systems that have the capacity to prepare for and respond effectively to an emergency, maintain basic functions when a crisis occurs, and reorganize and transform if conditions require,” Dr. Barbosa said.

The PAHO Director also highlighted that expanding primary health care is key to addressing the burden of non-communicable diseases (NCDs), particularly given that 240 million people currently live with a chronic condition in the Americas.

To ensure a focus on primary health care, Dr. Barbosa urged countries to strengthen the stewardship of health authorities, the governance of health systems, improve social empowerment, and develop integrated health services focused on primary care.

“The leadership role of National Health Authorities is undeniable,” Dr. Barbosa added, thanking the Ministers for participating in the dialogue.

Countries must now invest in “creating, strengthening, and institutionalizing spaces for social participation where people can learn, participate, get involved, and hold health leaders and systems accountable to address collective needs,” he added.

“Achieving universal health in our Region requires our joint effort and collaboration. From the Pan American Health Organization, we reiterate our commitment to provide all our

technical capacity to support Member States in achieving this objective.”

### **Quotes from panelists**

#### **Dr. Frank C.S. Anthony, Minister of Health of Guyana**

“We recognize that primary health care is the foundation of our health care system and that’s why we’re placing so much emphasis on the development of primary health care, to give people access, to ensure people have an expanded range of services they can get and also to bring it as close as possible to their communities so they can benefit from all of these services.”

#### **Dr Nisia Trinidad Lima, Minister of Health of Brazil**

"Brazil is no different from other countries in our region and in the world, facing issues such as mental health care challenges, challenges of demographic transition, and challenges that date back to the 20th century alongside some that are new, such as the emergence of new diseases, chronic diseases, and diseases that can be eliminated as public health care concerns such as tuberculosis. With the collaboration of PAHO we will certainly move forward in these issues."

#### **Dr. Francisco Alabi, Minister of Health of El Salvador**

"This pandemic has posed many challenges for the whole world, but above all it has shown how health care can be unified, how the world can come together with a single objective - to take care of populations and specifically to take care of the health of populations in the face of adversity.”

#### **Dr. Jaime Urrego, Vice minister of Public Health, Colombia**

We believe that primary health care, throughout the country, requires several transformations, including effectively ensuring access. Although we have good coverage and financial support, millions of people continue to face barriers in accessing health.

#### **Juan Núñez Guadarrama, Coordinator, México Salud-Hable Coalition**

"Health is an unavoidable part of economic growth and development, and exercising the right to health is crucial to being able to exercise all other human rights.”

## Links

[Video - Health for all: Strengthening primary healthcare to build resilient systems](#)

[Dr. Barbosa - World Health Day message](#)

[World Health Day 2023](#)

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The Pan American Health Organization (PAHO) works with the countries of the Americas to improve the health and quality of life of its population. Founded in 1902, it is the world's oldest international public health agency. It serves as the Regional Office of WHO for the Americas and is the specialized health agency of the Inter-American system.