

# PAHO



Pan American  
Health  
Organization



World Health  
Organization  
REGIONAL OFFICE FOR THE AMERICAS



## News release

### **World Malaria Day - Countries must step up efforts to reach vulnerable populations, PAHO Director says**



**Washington, D.C., 25 April 2023 (PAHO)** – On World Malaria Day, the Pan American Health Organization (PAHO) Director, Dr. Jarbas Barbosa, calls on countries to intensify malaria elimination efforts among indigenous, mobile and remote communities, the populations disproportionately affected by the disease.

Although the total number of malaria cases in the Region spiked from 2015 to 2019, increased efforts towards elimination in the 18 endemic countries have yielded positive results, with 520,000 cases reported in 2021 – a 13% reduction from the

previous year.

The number of deaths also declined from 197 in 2019, to 120 deaths in 2021 thanks to improved case management in countries with the highest disease burdens. Early diagnosis and treatment remain key to preventing mortality and reducing transmission.

“We have the tools needed to provide populations with highly effective diagnosis, treatment, and prevention interventions, but we need to step up our efforts and tailor responses to specific settings,” the Director stated in a video message to commemorate the day.

To ensure this, countries must “engage local communities, strengthen primary health care, and ensure sustainable funding to maintain progress towards elimination,” he added.

In 2018, Paraguay was certified malaria-free, followed by Argentina in 2019 and El Salvador in 2021. Belize is also on track to receive certification, after remaining malaria-free for the past three years.

Malaria is an acute disease caused by Plasmodium, a parasite transmitted by the bite of an infected Anopheles mosquito. Symptoms, including fever, headache and chills appear 10-15 days after a bite and may be mild or, left untreated, can progress to severe illness and death.

Insufficient availability of malaria services in remote endemic areas continues to affect the response to the disease. The theme of World Malaria Day 2023, Time to deliver zero malaria: invest, innovate, implement, highlights the critical importance of sustained interventions tailored to reach these vulnerable communities. To ensure consistent progress, PAHO recommends the implementation of evidence-based actions that address local realities.

Generation of granular data is key to inform the transition from control to elimination as this is the only way to interpret local transmission dynamics and design appropriate interventions.

“Eliminating malaria is possible,” Dr. Barbosa added. “It is time to urge mobilization of resources and support towards malaria elimination in the Americas.”

PAHO continues to work with countries of the Region and partner networks to support the elimination of malaria, one of the 30 diseases and conditions PAHO seeks to end by 2030 through its Disease Elimination Initiative: Towards Healthier Generations.

To advance malaria elimination, PAHO has also created Malaria Champions of the Americas, an initiative recognizing advances towards elimination of malaria in the Region, including projects that focus on high burden municipalities and areas with limited access to health services and hard to reach populations.

Nominations for Malaria Champions of the Americas are currently being accepted until 12 May 2023. The winners will be announced on 6 November 2023, which coincides with Malaria Day in the Americas.

### **Links**

[World Malaria Day \(WHO\)](#)

[Malaria Champions of the Americas](#)

[Disease Elimination Initiative: Towards Healthier Generations](#)

### **MEDIA CONTACTS**

Luciana Viegas: + 1 202 981-8455

Ashley Baldwin: + 1 202 340-4025

Sebastian Oliel: +1 202 316-5679

[mediateam@paho.org](mailto:mediateam@paho.org)

[www.paho.org](http://www.paho.org)

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.