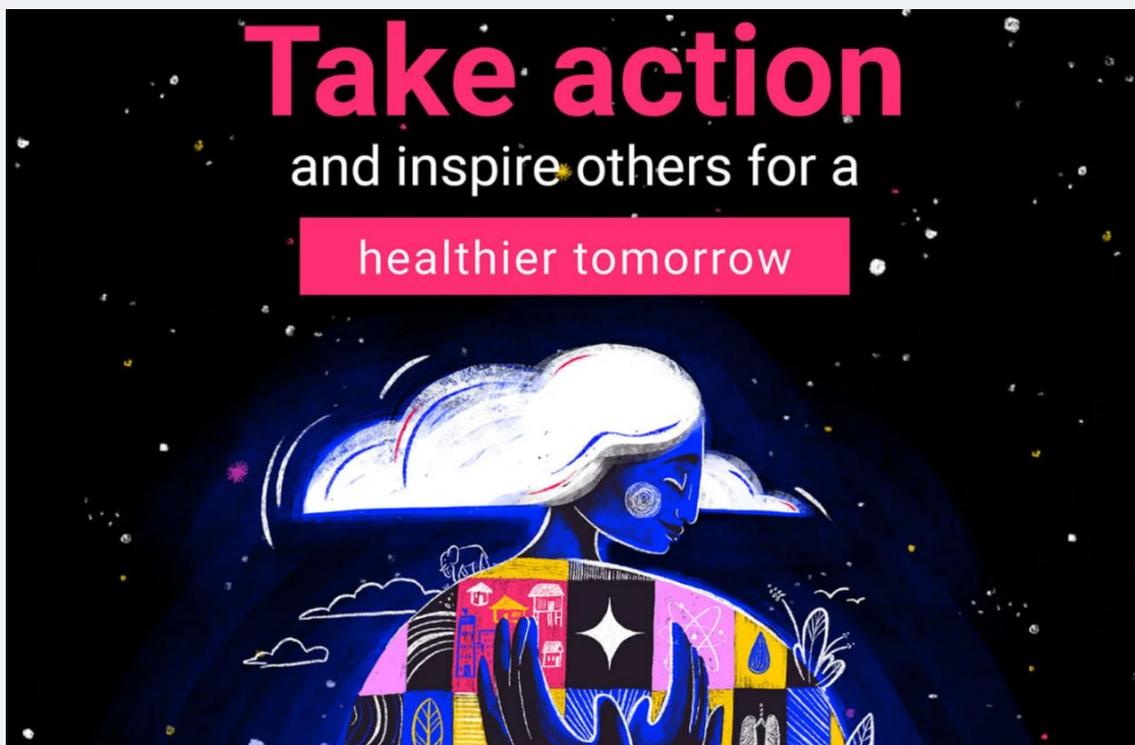




On World Health Day, PAHO Director calls for concerted action to safeguard the health of the planet and its people



Washington, DC, 7 April 2022 (PAHO) – After two years of the COVID-19 pandemic with millions of lives lost to the virus, Pan American Health Organization Director (PAHO) Carissa F. Etienne, marked World Health Day by calling for the urgent protection of the environment and highlighted how the health of the planet is linked to our own.

"The so-called triple planetary crisis of climate change, loss of biodiversity, and pollution is affecting the health of all people as well as our planet. Those effects are amplified by deficiencies in infrastructure and health systems to prevent diseases and effectively respond to crises, disasters, and emergencies," the Director said in a high-level [online event](#) entitled "Our Planet, Our Health," which was attended by over 400 participants.

Health ministers from the region, including Dr. Carla Vizzotti, Minister of Health of Argentina, Dr. Jose Manuel Matheu, Secretary of Health of Honduras and Dr. Christopher Tufton, Minister of Health and Wellness of Jamaica participated in a virtual PAHO event to mark the day, as did Dr. Jacqueline Alvarez, Director for Latin America and the Caribbean of the United Nations Environment Program (UNEP).

Focusing on the Americas as one of the most unequal regions in the world, "where wealth inequality, political inequality, and social inequality are rampant," Dr Etienne highlighted that "extra transformative efforts must be taken to protect the health of the most vulnerable populations from environmental risks."

"Over the past three decades, we have witnessed concerted global action to build a sustainable planet. During this period, we have noted enhancements in health services and improvements in the health of peoples in the Region of the Americas," the PAHO Director said. Intersectoral collaboration across the health and water and sanitation sectors, for example, has reduced the mortality risk among children under 5 years from 219 to 23 deaths per 100,000 population – that is 1.8 million young lives saved since 1990," Dr. Etienne said.

Nevertheless, every year in the Americas, an estimated one million premature deaths are attributable to avoidable environmental risks. Air pollution, contaminated water, inadequate sanitation including solid waste management, risks related to certain hazardous chemicals, and negative impacts related to climate change are the most pressing environmental public health threats for the Region.

"Today's World Health Day theme– Our Planet, Our Health – is a call for a green and healthy recovery from the COVID-19 pandemic, which places the health of individuals and the planet at the center of actions and fosters a movement to create societies focused on well-being," added Dr. Etienne, calling on Member States to recommit to regional solidarity and to strengthen individual and collective actions to better protect the region's health.

To help countries advance in meeting the environment and health

challenges, PAHO last year launched the Agenda for the Americas on Health, Environment, and Climate Change, 2021–2030, the Director said. The agenda will benefit all countries and territories by, among others, promoting good governance practices, strengthening leadership and coordination roles in the health sector, and fostering cross-sectoral action.

“The future depends on us as we are not only the custodians of today but the architects of tomorrow,” Dr. Etienne concluded.

Background information for press

- Approximately 431 million people in the Americas Region still do not have access to safe sanitation, and out of this number, 9.9 million still practice open defecation; 161 million people still do not have access to safe drinking water, resulting in about 30,000 preventable deaths each year.
- Household and ambient air pollution is linked to almost 320,000 preventable deaths per year in the Region due to stroke, heart disease, lung disease and cancer. Globally, almost 80 million people still depend on polluting fuels, such as solid fuels or kerosene to support their needs for lighting, cooking, and heating – a problem that disproportionately affects women and children.
- People are still being exposed to hazardous chemicals, such as mercury, lead, and pesticides – which not only jeopardize the health of the persons directly exposed, but also that of unborn children, who can suffer ill effects throughout their life span.
- Extreme weather events can directly increase the prevalence of some diseases and cause injury and death. Additionally, changing climate patterns can modify human health, by exacerbating food and water insecurity and population migration, compromising mental health, and altering the usual transmission patterns of zoonotic- and waterborne diseases. Those living in poverty, in precarious housing conditions on small islands and coastal areas, are at greater risk due to more frequent and severe weather events and rising sea levels coupled with a reduced ability to adapt.
- New environment-related hazards to health are increasingly being recognized – for example, exposure to substances in electronic waste, the environmental and health effects of micro- and nano-plastics, and increased antimicrobial resistance, among others.

Links

PAHO World Health Day event - <https://www.paho.org/en/events/virtual-commemoration-world-health-day-april-7th-2022-our-planet-our-health>

[World Health Day message from PAHO Director](#)

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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.