



PAHO and Unitaid launch collaboration to advance the elimination of mother-to-child transmission of Chagas disease

Geneva/Washington DC, 30 June 2022 – The Pan American Health Organization (PAHO) and Unitaid today launched a five-year, US\$ 2.6 million partnership to scale-up regional and national efforts to eliminate mother-to-child transmission of Chagas disease.

Chagas is a neglected tropical disease endemic to Latin America, where it kills more people than any other parasite-borne infection. The infection is caused primarily by a blood-sucking triatomine bug, but the disease can also be transmitted from mother to child during pregnancy. According to the World Health Organization (WHO), more than one million women of childbearing age are estimated to be infected, resulting in up to 15,000 infants born with the disease each year.

“Chagas disease holds a significant burden for more than 6 million people in 20 endemic countries of the Americas, many of them women and newborns”, said Dr. Carissa F. Etienne, Director of PAHO. “With this partnership, we expect to foster and accelerate investments and commitments so that every child, everywhere in the region is born free of Chagas and the mothers living with the disease receive the treatment they need”.

The fight against Chagas disease is complicated by several factors including its multiple means of transmission, through insect bites but also from the blood of an affected person or even by consumption of contaminated food. It is also largely asymptomatic, causing affected persons to go without medical attention until developing chronic infection, which is more difficult to treat. A lack in efficient diagnostic tools, long and difficult treatment, and gaps in policy and funding pose additional challenges.

“With less than 10 percent of people infected with Chagas disease worldwide diagnosed, and even fewer treated, Unitaid seeks to fill an enormous gap that leaves women and infants at serious risk of infection,” said Dr Philippe Duneton, Executive Director of Unitaid. “This first of its kind partnership between Unitaid and PAHO will ensure

advances to Chagas-fighting tools can quickly become a reality for people across Latin America and beyond.”

The collaboration will leverage insights from another Unitaid-funded initiative CUIDA Chagas, which aims to develop test, treat, and care strategies that can be replicated in different countries and contexts. The project will determine the efficacy of new shorter treatment options for Chagas disease and validate ways to shorten the time needed for diagnosis.

PAHO will provide technical expertise to support the countries and institutions under the CUIDA Chagas project, namely, Bolivia, Brazil, Colombia, and Paraguay. The aim is to develop better ways to interrupt mother to child transmission of Chagas disease, and share key learnings and advances to benefit the entire region.

The PAHO and Unitaid partnership will amplify the impact of this work, ensuring that evidence directly informs policy guidance and quickly advances the wider use of more affordable point-of-care diagnostics, better counseling and treatment, and comprehensive care for women and newborns.

About Unitaid

[Unitaid](#) is a global health agency engaged in finding innovative solutions to prevent, diagnose, and treat diseases more quickly, cheaply, and effectively, in low- and middle-income countries. Its work includes funding initiatives to address major diseases such as HIV/AIDS, malaria, and tuberculosis, as well as HIV co-infections and co-morbidities such as cervical cancer and hepatitis C, and cross-cutting areas, such as fever management. Unitaid is now applying its expertise to address challenges in advancing new therapies and diagnostics for the COVID-19 pandemic, serving as a key member of the [Access to COVID-19 Tools \(ACT\) Accelerator](#). Unitaid is hosted by the [World Health Organization](#).

About PAHO

The [Pan American Health Organization \(PAHO\)](#) works to improve the health and well-being in countries of the Americas. Founded in 1902, it is the world’s oldest international public health agency and the specialized health agency of the Inter-American system. It also serves as the Regional Office of WHO for the Americas.

Links

[Unitaid-funded CUIDA Chagas project](#)

[PAHO CHAGAS Disease](#)

[PAHO Initiative Elimination of Infectious Diseases: Towards Healthier Generations](#)

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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.