

# PAHO



Pan American  
Health  
Organization



World Health  
Organization  
REGIONAL OFFICE FOR THE AMERICAS



## News release

# PAHO and partners launch campaign to reduce maternal mortality in Latin America and the Caribbean

*Every hour, a woman loses her life in the region due to complications in pregnancy, childbirth or postpartum, the vast majority of which are preventable.*

**9 out of 10** maternal deaths are **preventable**.



**Washington DC, March 8, 2023 (PAHO/WHO)** - The Pan American Health Organization (PAHO) together with other United Nations agencies and partners, today launched a campaign to encourage countries in Latin American and the Caribbean to reduce maternal mortality, which increased by 15% between 2016 and 2020.

Around 8,400 women die each year in the region from complications in pregnancy, childbirth and postpartum. High blood pressure, severe bleeding, and complications from unsafe abortion are the most common causes. However, nine out of ten of these deaths are preventable through quality care, access to contraception and by reducing inequities in access to care.

"Too many women, particularly indigenous, Afro-descendant, migrant, low-income and less educated women, continue to die during pregnancy and childbirth," Dr. Jarbas Barbosa, PAHO Director, said during the launch of the campaign on International Women's Day. "It is time to urgently invest in maternal health and change this unacceptable reality."

*[Zero Maternal Deaths. Prevent the Preventable](#)* seeks to accelerate progress towards the regional goal of less than 30 maternal deaths per 100,000 live births outlined in PAHO's Sustainable Health Agenda for the Americas. Last year, the maternal mortality ratio (i. e., the number of maternal deaths per 100,000 live births) in Latin America and the Caribbean was 68 per 100,000 live births.

The COVID-19 pandemic caused a 20-year setback in maternal health in the region, with a 15% increase in maternal mortality between 2016 and 2020, following a 16.4% reduction between 1990 and 2015.

"If we want to get back on track with reducing maternal mortality we must address the socioeconomic, gender, ethnicity, education and geographical inequities that lead to the death of so many women," Suzanne Serruya, Director of PAHO's Latin American Center of Perinatology, Women and Reproductive Health (CLAP) said. "Doing so requires the involvement of all sectors of government and society."

Accessible maternal health services, as well as professionals who are available, trained, equipped and respectful of the rights and particularities of expectant mothers is also key to reducing maternal mortality.

"The reversal in the pace of maternal mortality reduction is a harsh and unfortunate reality in Latin America and the Caribbean," Susana Sottoli, Regional Director for Latin America and the Caribbean of the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA) said. "We call on governments, civil society, the private sector and communities to put an end to the situation of thousands of women for whom the

miracle of giving birth becomes a tragic reality."

*Zero Maternal Deaths. Preventing the Preventable* is an initiative of the Regional Task Force for the Reduction of Maternal Mortality (GTR). The campaign will focus on the dissemination of social media messages and country-specific actions throughout May. It also includes a call for action to all of society to protect women and newborns.

The campaign launch ended with the signing of a joint declaration to reduce maternal mortality.

Other participants at the event included Nayeline Medina, from the Network of Afro-Latin American, Afro-Caribbean and Diaspora Women; Debora Bossemeyer, Vice President of Global Programs and Operations of Jhpiego; Frank Anthony, Minister of Health of Guyana; José Manuel Matheu, Secretary of Health of Honduras; Julio Borba, Minister of Public Health and Social Welfare of Paraguay; and Lida Sosa Arguello, Vice Minister of Health and Health Surveillance of the Ministry of Public Health of Paraguay.

### **Maternal mortality in Latin America and the Caribbean, 2020\***

- Approximately 8,400 women -almost 3% of the global total - died from causes related to pregnancy and childbirth in Latin America and the Caribbean.
- Of those, 1,300 were in the Caribbean.
- Between 1990 and 2015, maternal mortality in Latin America decreased by 16.4%, but increased by 15% between 2016 and 2020.
- 13 countries had a very low maternal mortality rate (20 or less maternal deaths per 100,000 live births); 26 reported a low rate (less than 100), and 6 had a high or moderate rate (between 100 and 499).
- In PAHO's Sustainable Health Agenda, countries of the region have committed to achieve a maternal mortality ratio of less than 30 maternal deaths per 100,000 live births.

\*Source: Trends in Maternal Mortality  
(WHO) <https://www.who.int/publications/i/item/9789240068759>

### **About GTR**

The Regional Task Force for the Reduction of Maternal Mortality is an inter-agency mechanism formed by United Nations agencies, bilateral and multilateral

cooperation organizations, non-governmental organizations and professional networks in the region. Since its creation in 1998, it has promoted collaboration and synergy among different regional actors to implement policies and programs to reduce maternal morbidity and mortality in Latin America and the Caribbean.

GTR members are PAHO/WHO, UNFPA, UNICEF, the Inter-American Development Bank (IDB), the World Bank (WB), the United States Agency for International Development (USAID), the International Confederation of Midwives (ICM), the Latin American Federation of Obstetrics and Gynecology Societies, Management Sciences for Health (MSH), MOMENTUM Country and Global Leadership and Fòs Feminista.

## **Links**

[Zero Maternal Deaths. Prevent the preventable - PAHO/WHO | Pan American Health Organization](#)

[Maternal Health - PAHO](#)

[Sustainable Health Agenda for the Americas 2018-2030](#)

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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.