

PAHO



Pan American
Health
Organization



World Health
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REGIONAL OFFICE FOR THE
AMERICAS

News release

More must be done to protect nursing workforce as COVID cases rise in the Americas, says PAHO Director

Nurses play a central role in vaccination programs and in caring for those that fall ill. Countries must double investments and improve policies to support "backbone" of health care systems.



Washington D.C., 4 May (PAHO) – As COVID cases and hospitalizations once again rise in the Americas – by 12.7% since last week - the Pan American Health Organization (PAHO) Director, Carissa F. Etienne, has called on countries to urgently increase investments to develop and retain the nursing workforce.

“Throughout the Americas, nurses bravely faced the brunt of the pandemic, and many struggled with burnout and mental health conditions,” with some moving out of area and others leaving the workforce altogether, the Director said in a media briefing today.

Nurses are the backbone of the healthcare workforce, especially during the pandemic, accounting for 56% of the health staff and providing primary care services, mental health support, and protecting the wellbeing of individuals, communities, and families.

Ahead of International Nurses Day, celebrated on 12 May, the PAHO Director thanked nurses for playing a central role in caring for those with COVID-19, and for being key to rolling out 1.8 billion doses of COVID-19 vaccine in the region.

“Today, nurses shoulder the dual burden of caring for COVID patients and catching up those who have missed routine health check-ups over the past two years,” the Director said.

But with a nursing deficit estimated at 1.8 million nurses by 2030 in the Americas, it is crucial that we “double our investments in growing our nursing workforce, and care for existing nurses so they can continue to care for us,” she added.

The PAHO Director urged countries to implement clear policies to develop and retain the health workforce, including through adequate compensation and the development of senior leadership opportunities, as well as by elevating nurses and midwives within the government and Ministries of Health.

Supporting the mental health of nurses is also crucial, with [PAHO’s COVID-19 Health care workers study](#) showing that almost one quarter of health care workers interviewed in 2020 presented symptoms of a depressive episode.

Some countries are addressing this through the implementation of mental health services and hotlines.

PAHO is also rolling out a self-care course catered specifically to health workers, and on Friday May 6, will launch a [High-Level Commission on Mental Health and COVID-19](#) to take a closer look at the impact of the pandemic on mental health in the Americas.

Turning to the COVID-19 situation in the region, more than 616,000 new cases were reported in the Americas over the past week, and over 4200 deaths.

In the Caribbean, new infections increased by 15.4% and deaths increased for the third

consecutive week – by 39.6%.

While deaths continued to decline in Central America, the number of new infections rose by 53.4%, with three out of seven countries reporting increases.

In North America, cases increased by 27.1% in the United States, while Canada and Mexico reported declines in new infections.

South America reported an overall case decrease of 8%, although seven countries reported an increase in new infections.

Links

[Conferencia de prensa de la OPS sobre COVID-19 / PAHO's Press Briefing on COVID-19 - AUDIO ORIGINAL](#)

[PAHO Press Briefing on COVID19 - AUDIO ENGLISH](#)

[Coletiva de Imprensa OPAS - COVID-19 - AUDIO PORTUGUÊS](#)

[Conférence de Presse COVID-19 – AUDIO FRANÇAIS](#)

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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.