

## **PAHO selects centers in Argentina, Brazil to develop COVID-19 mRNA vaccines**

**Washington DC, September 21, 2021 (PAHO)** – The Pan American Health Organization (PAHO) has announced the selection of two centers in Argentina and Brazil as regional hubs for the development and production of mRNA-based vaccines in Latin America in a bid to tackle COVID-19 and future infectious-disease challenges.

The Bio-Manguinhos Institute of Technology on Immunobiologicals at the Oswaldo Cruz Foundation (FIOCRUZ) was selected as the center in Brazil. The institute has a long tradition in vaccine manufacturing and has made promising advances in the development of an innovative mRNA vaccine against COVID-19.

Sinergium Biotech, a private sector biopharmaceutical company, was selected as the center in Argentina. Sinergium will partner with pharmaceutical mAbxience, which belongs to the same group, to develop and manufacture active vaccine ingredients. The two companies have extensive experience in the production and development of vaccines and biotechnological medicines.

The announcement was made by Dr. Soumya Swaminathan, World Health Organization (WHO) Chief Scientist, and PAHO Assistant Director Dr. Jarbas Barbosa during a side event on the margins of PAHO's 59th Directing Council. The "Technology Transfer to produce mRNA Vaccines in the Americas" event brought together health ministers and authorities from countries in the region to discuss vaccine production.

"We congratulate the two selected centers," Dr. Jarbas Barbosa said. "There is hard work ahead, but we are driven by the conviction that this endeavor will result in timely and equitable access to vaccines in our region, which continues to be the hardest hit by this pandemic."

The selection is the result of an April 2021 WHO call for expression of interest inviting manufacturers and research institutions to contribute to the establishment of COVID-19 mRNA vaccine technology transfer hubs in emerging economies. The initiative was supported by PAHO/WHO global partners such as the Medicines Patent Pool.

The call attracted some thirty expressions of interest from Latin American companies and scientific institutions. In order to ensure sustainability and increased regional capacity even further, PAHO launched a second call for expressions of interest in August 2021. This call was particularly aimed at manufacturers that wish to become part of a regional consortium to supply pharmaceutical grade reagents and other inputs for mRNA vaccine production.

PAHO has also recently launched the Regional Platform to Advance the Manufacturing of COVID-19 Vaccines and other Health Technologies in the Americas. The platform will support collaboration across countries and agencies to apply existing regional biomanufacturing capacity to the production of COVID-19 vaccines and other medical technologies. The principle behind the platform is that pharmaceutical manufacture should benefit the entire region, with regional production and distribution of vaccines by PAHO's Revolving Fund to all countries.

"Delays in production have meant that many countries [in the region] are still awaiting the doses they purchased months ago. Limited vaccine supplies continue to set us back," PAHO Director Dr. Carissa F. Etienne said in her opening remarks to the side event. "This limited production and unequal distribution of vaccines in the face of staggering demand hinder our COVID response in the Americas. Mass vaccination is critical," she added.

The region of the Americas has borne the brunt of COVID-19 infections to date, with 87.6 million cases recorded and over 2.16 million lives lost. Vaccine distribution continues to be unequal, with few countries in the region reaching the 40% COVID-19 vaccine target set out by WHO.

#### **MEDIA CONTACTS**

**Sebastián Oliel: +1 202 316-5679**

**Ashley Baldwin: + 1 202 340-4025**

**Daniel Epstein: +1 301 219-2105**

**Nancy Nusser: + 1 410 934-9588**

[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.