



Improve the health of communities, women, and children by eliminating trachoma as a public health problem in the Americas



## Pan American Health Organization initiative in alliance with the Government of Canada

In 2023, a partnership between the Government of Canada and the Pan American Health Organization (PAHO) was initiated, to implement the initiative to **improve the health of communities, women, and children by eliminating trachoma as a public health problem**. With this initiative, through a contribution of 15 million Canadian dollars, the Government of Canada is supporting efforts to eliminate trachoma as a public health problem in the Region over the next 5 years.

This initiative is aligned with PAHO's policy and [initiative for the elimination of communicable diseases and related conditions](#), which aims to eliminate more than 30 diseases by 2030, with a common, integrated, and sustainable approach, promoting linkages and synergies, within the health system and with other sectors.

Trachoma is the leading cause of infectious blindness worldwide and is transmitted by direct contact with ocular and nasal secretions from people infected with the bacterium *Chlamydia trachomatis*. Elimination of trachoma is an opportunity to increase access to and demand for integrated health services for populations with insufficient access to health services, water, and basic sanitation, especially women, children, hard-to-reach populations, and Indigenous Populations.

PAHO will provide technical cooperation to the Ministries of Health of ten countries in Latin America and the Caribbean to strengthen their national capacities and support elimination efforts in close coordination with subnational and local health authorities. Priority will be given to integrated actions in vulnerable populations, the access to and demand for health services, the empowerment of women and communities, and surveillance actions with gender and intercultural approaches.

## **POPULATION AND GEOGRAPHIC AREAS FOR INTERVENTION**

In the Region, trachoma is endemic in rural and remote areas of **Brazil**, **Colombia**, **Guatemala**, and **Peru**, where 5.6 million people are at risk of the disease that disproportionately affects women and children. In these countries, there is a need to increase access to and demand for a package of integrated interventions known as the **SAFE strategy**. The SAFE strategy is the World Health Organization (WHO) recommended strategy to eliminate trachoma and includes **S**-surgery to prevent visual impairment and eventual blindness, **A**-antibiotics to treat infection, **F**-facial hygiene, and **E**-environmental improvement to prevent infection and interrupt disease transmission.

Additionally, the initiative will support actions in **Bolivia**, **Ecuador**, **El Salvador**, **Haiti**, and **Venezuela** where there are approximately 4 million people whose socioeconomic, demographic, environmental, and epidemiological conditions suggest trachoma may be a public health problem and require surveillance activities in prioritized communities. The aim is to confirm the presence or absence of the disease and collect evidence contributing to declaring the Americas free of trachoma.



In 2017, **Mexico** was the first country in the Region to eliminate trachoma as a public health problem. The initiative will support the strengthening of surveillance actions in the formerly endemic population (5 municipalities in the State of Chiapas with 178 thousand people) to detect early the possible reappearance of the disease in the post-elimination phase.

## IN NUMBERS:

**5.6**

million people at risk of suffering trachoma in rural, remote, and endemic areas of Brazil, Colombia, Guatemala, and Peru

**10**

countries participate in the initiative for the elimination of trachoma in the Americas

**1**

country has eliminated trachoma as a public health problem in the region: Mexico, in 2017

## EXPECTED RESULTS OF THE INITIATIVE

In addition to achieving the goal of eliminating trachoma in countries with affected populations, confirming that trachoma is not a public health problem in other countries, and sustaining post-elimination surveillance, it is expected that the initiative will contribute to use trachoma elimination actions as a platform for reaching out populations living in vulnerable conditions to increase access to quality health services, improve health information and surveillance systems, address social and environmental determinants of health, and strengthen governance to leave no one behind.

The elimination of trachoma as a public health problem in the Region of the Americas will promote health equity and improve the quality of life of the population, integrating trachoma actions with other actions of interest in public health, with services focused on the needs and the context in which people and communities live, with approaches sensitive to gender and culture.