# Fostering Health and Human Security in the Americas

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## INTRODUCTION

Mounting evidence and growing experience demonstrate that the insecurities people face are multiple and interrelated, and that to build truly resilient populations in the face of these threats will require preventive and synchronous action across state actors, simultaneous with efforts to strengthen community capacity. This requires a systems approach.

Today, human security represents a key aspect of the Pan American Health Organization's (PAHO) efforts to improve health in the Region of Americas[1], although the Organization's support for the concept is not new. PAHO's role in advancing discussion of the relationship between health and human security (H&HS) originated with the submission of the report "Health and Hemispheric Security" to the Permanent Council of the Organization of American States in 2002.[2] The report emphasized the fundamental role that health plays in human security and was the first in the Region to highlight the mutual dependence of H&HS. H&HS initiatives within the Region increased in tandem with growing awareness and support of the human security concept, spurred on by such developments as the 2003 publication of the "Human Security Now" report.[3]

PAHO and Member States' commitment to human security in the Americas was formalized with the 2010 adoption of Resolution CD50.R16, entitled "Health, Human Security and Well-being".[4] In considering the linkages between health, inequity and other root causes of insecurity, and recognizing the comprehensive nature of the human security approach, the resolution encourages Member States to explore the integration of human security in national health plans. The Director's Annual Report of the same year, entitled "Promoting Health, Wellbeing and Human Security" further encouraged the use of the human security approach in activities to improve health in the Americas.[5]

## IMPORTANCE OF THE APPROACH TO PAHO MEMBER STATES

The greatest threats to health and well-being in the Region of the Americas today represent complex, interrelated challenges, including violence and crisis, environmental risks, infectious and poverty-related diseases, emergencies and disasters, climate change, and inequity. Such challenges require a broadly-scoped paradigm to be fully understood and meaningfully addressed. Earlier concepts of citizen security and health security, while moving in the right direction, are narrow in scope, with the threat of crime or violence being addressed by the former and acute public health threats or emergencies addressed by the latter. By contrast, the human security concept is a comprehensive and proactive approach to understanding how factors across multiple domains of life interact to produce insecurity. Thus, by offering a comprehensive and preventive focus, the human security approach strengthens PAHO's existing efforts to address the multiple dimensions of these critical and pervasive threats.

Human security's shared values with public health serve to enrich many of PAHO's strategic objectives, including disease prevention and capacity building, which require integrated, collaborative action across sectors. For example, as an "upstream" approach prioritizing proactive versus reactive strategies, human security furthers PAHO's efforts to reduce the burden of preventable disease. Another aspect of human security, which complements values embraced by PAHO, and other members of the public health community is its dual emphasis on the role of the state in protecting populations *as well as* the importance of empowering communities to act on their own behalf.

Together, public health and human security generate more effective and sustainable strategies to address root causes of insecurity, and thereby accelerate gains in human survival, livelihood and dignity.

## PAHO EFFORTS TO DATE

PAHO has continued to promote H&HS in accordance with the mandates of CD50.R16, and is now focusing on bridging the gap between theory and practice. To date, these efforts have culminated in the publication of "Health and Human Security: Implications for Public Health" in August of 2012.[6] This technical reference document was developed with input gained from contributors during sub-regional and international consultations and draws on insight from a number of human security efforts in the Region. It is intended to promote further awareness of the relationship between H&HS and to serve as a key reference for the development of policy guidelines and implementation tools.

This publication was launched in September when PAHO, in collaboration with the Japan Center for International Exchange, held a multi-day Regional Meeting on Health and Human Security in Lima, Peru.[7] The meeting brought together Member State representatives, program leaders, and stakeholders from multiple continents to engage in dialogue on the importance of H&HS. Participants discussed current efforts to address insecurities in the Americas, broadened their understanding of the approach, and explored lessons gained from experiences integrating the concept into health initiatives.

## LOOKING TO THE FUTURE

Presently, acceptance is growing around the world of the importance of the human security approach and its added value to public health efforts. Action from the UN over the past year has lent even greater momentum and coherence to the movement to embrace human security principles, with the Secretary General's Report[8], which gave special focus to the relationship between H&HS, and the adoption of the General Assembly Resolution on the Common Understanding of Human Security.[9] The current challenge, however, lies in supporting Member States and other actors to effectively apply these principles within health policies and integrate them into their public health programs and health services. Therefore, it is a priority to develop policy and operational procedures that will guide policymakers and practitioners to effectively integrate human security principles in health policies, plans and programs.

Additional needs include identifying and improving methods and tools available with which to assess communities' H&HS, and with which to measure the impact of

H&HS initiatives. PAHO is working to elaborate such procedures and tools through ongoing case study analyses and collaborative partnership activities. Parallel strategic efforts involve building professional networks and a community of practice, which could vitally contribute to the generation of knowledge, exchange of information, and identification of best practices in the Region and beyond as we advance from human security theory to implementation strategies for health. Continuing efforts of the organization to promote H&HS in practice are driven by the goal of reducing inequity and promoting health for people to live in dignity throughout the Region of the Americas.

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[1] The PAHO/WHO Region of the Americas is defined as the States and territories of the Western Hemisphere; the geographical area from Canada in the north to Patagonia in the south and includes the Caribbean.

[2] Pan American Health Organization / World Health Organization (PAHO/WHO), *Health and Hemispheric Security* (Washington, DC: PAHO/WHO, 2002).

[3] United Nations, Commission on Human Security (UN/CHS), *Human Security Now* (New York: UN/CHS, 2003).

[4] PAHO/WHO, 50th Directing Council, *Resolution CD50.R16: Health, Human Security, and Well-being* (Washington, DC: PAHO/WHO, 2010).

[5] PAHO/WHO, *Annual Report of the Director, 2010: Promoting Heath, Well-being and Human Security* (Washington, DC: PAHO/WHO, 2010).

[6] PAHO/WHO, *Human Security: Implications for Public Health; Technical Reference Document* (Washington, DC: PAHO/WHO, 2012).

[7] For more information and materials from this event visit www.paho.org/healthandhumansecurity

[8] United Nations, *Follow-up to General Assembly Resolution 64/291 on Human Security* (Document A/66/763), (New York: United Nations, 2012).

[9] United Nations, *General Assembly Resolution A/RES/66/290: Follow-up to Paragraph 143 on Human Security of the 2005 World Summit,* (New York: United Nations, 2012).