

# HEALTH PLAN FOR AFRO-DESCENDANT YOUTH IN LATIN AMERICA AND THE CARIBBEAN



Pan American  
Health  
Organization



World Health  
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REGIONAL OFFICE FOR THE Americas



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## Introduction

The Health Plan for Afro-descendant Youth emerged from the efforts of the Pan American Health Organization (PAHO) to create opportunities for dialogue that promote and facilitate social participation in actions related to the health and well-being of the different ethnic groups that share the Region of the Americas, throughout the different stages of the life course.

There is a wide demographic, territorial, social, and cultural variety among Afro-descendant youth. Moreover, this is one of the groups most affected by structural processes of exclusion, inequality, and poverty. Because these circumstances have an impact on health, it is essential to formulate actions that ensure the participation of these young people, as well as respect for human rights, interculturalism, and gender equality.

This initiative is framed by a major international consensus that recognizes the need to respect the human rights of Afro-descendant people, as well as the need to reorient health services using an intercultural approach to advance equity and social justice. Leading examples include the International Decade for People of African Descent (2015-2024), the Plan of Action for the Decade for People of African Descent in the Americas (2016-2025), and PAHO's Policy on Ethnicity and Health.

During a meeting held on the 1st and 2nd of December 2017, in Cartagena de Indias, Afro-descendant youth leaders had the opportunity to identify health priorities and reach a consensus on a proposed health plan for Afro-descendant youth, incorporating their own perspectives.

## Health Priority Areas Identified

### **Right to sexual and reproductive health with an intercultural approach**

These young Afro-descendants expressed concern that the existence of structural discrimination has an impact on access to health services, especially with regards to sexual and reproductive health. They believe that sexual and reproductive health services should be user-friendly, offering opportunities for information, orientation, and quality care, without discrimination and with cultural relevance and confidentiality. These services should include access to contraceptive methods, counseling services, maternal health care, and prevention of sexually transmitted infections, including HIV. they should also include care, treatment, support, prevention programs and protocols for prevention and monitoring of gender violence, especially with respect to LGBTI afro-descendants youth.

They also stressed the need to ensure the active participation of Afro-descendant youth in the design, implementation, monitoring, and evaluation of health services targeting them, both at the community level and nationally.

### **Mental health with a focus on the impact of structural racism**

The young Afro-descendants discussed the stigmatization and stereotyped viewpoints they often face, which are associated with mental health problems, among others. The presence of mental disorders, which can have a major impact on young people's general health, development, and life plans—tends to be associated with different social and health problems, such as increased use of alcohol, tobacco, and illicit substances, as well as adolescent pregnancy and increased engagement in other harmful behaviors.

In this regard, they noted that these problems must be addressed in a crosscutting manner, coordinating comprehensive care strategies with other areas relevant to Afro-descendant youth.

### **Lack of data and information**

One of the main problems that Afro-descendant youth face in the Region is a lack of data and information concerning their health situation and the diseases that affect them. The Afro-descendant youth at the meeting reported that in many countries, they are invisible under standard data collection methods, either due to failure of the civil registry to record their ethnic background or origin, or by other obstacles. They consider it of vital importance to generate evidence in order to address their health needs, generate knowledge about their own concepts of health and disease, and design health policies.

### **Effective participation with an intergenerational approach**

Afro-descendant youth at the meeting highlighted the need to ensure their active participation in consultation processes, and in preparation and decision-making regarding the health plans and programs that concern them, in addition to being strategic partners in the preparation, execution, monitoring, and evaluation of these measures. They emphasized the need to ensure broad participation, guaranteeing the needs and diversity of Afro-descendant youth on the basis of equality and nondiscrimination.

### **Traditional Afro-descendant medicine and ancestral knowledge**

Participants in the meeting viewed with concern the limited recognition and promotion of traditional medicine, and of Afro-descendant practices and ancestral knowledge of this kind. Furthermore, they recognized the role, value, and knowledge of elders, lay midwives, and other agents



of traditional Afro-descendant medicine. In this regard, they considered it necessary to generate interventions that seek to promote the capacities of traditional medicine and knowledge, systematize their practices, and promote their integration into health services.

### **Afro-descendant youth in vulnerable situations**

They recognized the need to adopt special measures for Afro-descendant youth in vulnerable situations, such as young people deprived of liberty, those belonging to migratory and displaced groups, young people living in the streets, and young people with disabilities. In particular, these young Afro-descendants viewed with concern that in many countries of the Region, the imprisoned population is disproportionately Afro-descendant. Among the factors that give rise to these problems are the historical processes that resulted in the structural racism and discrimination that Afro-descendant

people currently encounter, and which limit their opportunities. Accordingly, they considered it important to focus on social reintegration strategies for Afro-descendant people deprived of liberty as well as efforts to address their health issues, especially mental health, taking into account their social characteristics.





# LINES OF ACTION

HEALTH PLAN FOR AFRO-DESCENDANT YOUTH  
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# 1 Generation of Evidence

GOAL	RESULTS	
<p>Improve the comprehensive management of information on the health of Afro-descendant youth and on its indicators and determinants, oriented towards evidence-based policy-making</p>	<p>Ethnic variables relevant to health issues are incorporated into national information systems</p>	<p></p>
	<p>Health profiles of Afro-descendant youth are defined</p>	<p></p>
	<p>Information centers that include health evidence on Afro-descendant youth</p>	<p></p>

# 1 Generation of Evidence

## ACTIONS

Advocate for the inclusion of ethnic- and age-disaggregated variables in national information systems and in statistics of the Ministries of Health and other ministries (as applicable in each country)

Promote data analysis training for health workers and institutions

Monitor implementation, ensuring the participation of Afro-descendant youth in data logging systems

Systematize and disseminate best practices on the inclusion of ethnic variables and the use of information disaggregated by ethnic group

Outline and promote studies on the health situation of Afro-descendant youth and the social determinants of their health

Disseminate data, information, and studies regarding the health profile of Afro-descendant youth in the Region

Support the publication and dissemination of information that includes the Afro-descendant variable, disaggregated by age and sex

Support countries in using evidence to design health policies and programs for Afro-descendant youth

## 2 Promoting Policy Action

GOAL	RESULTS	
<p>Ensure effective participation and empowerment of Afro-descendant youth in designing, implementing, and monitoring health policies, plans, and projects for Afro-descendant youth in the Americas</p>	<p>Policies, plans, programs, and projects that include the perspective of the cultural identity of Afro-descendant youth</p>	
	<p>Projects and best practices that have a positive impact on the health of Afro-descendant youth in the Americas</p>	

## 2 Promoting Policy Action

### ACTIONS

Promote opportunities for interdisciplinary participation of Afro-descendant youth leaders in the Americas in order to:

- Share participatory projects and best practices
- Systematize and generate a comparative framework for the regulations implemented in these countries to address the health problems of Afro-descendant youth
- Carry out political and institutional advocacy for the design, implementation, and monitoring of policies, plans, programs, and projects
- Promote the empowerment and leadership of Afro-descendant youth, ensuring the inclusion of women and LGBTI afro descendant youth.
- Follow up and monitor implementation of the Health Plan for Afro-descendant Youth

Identify, promote, and strengthen community projects

Support Afro-descendant youth in monitoring projects related to health and its determinants

Support the creation of new participatory projects

### 3 Social Participation and Strategic Partnerships

GOAL	RESULTS	
<p>Integrate the health and ethnicity agenda into Afro-descendant organizations</p>	<p>Linkages between grassroots organizations, community councils, and community action boards</p>	
	<p>Linkage with Afro-descendant organizations in the Americas</p>	
<p>Forge strategic partnerships among Afro-descendant youth, government institutions, NGOs, and PAHO offices in each country</p>	<p>National and regional forums for dialogue between Afro-descendant youth and institutions</p>	
<p>Strengthen the participation of young people in the implementation of the Policy on Ethnicity and Health for Afro-descendant youth</p>	<p>Participation strengthened by knowledge dialogues between Afro-descendant youth and adults to formulate new health proposals benefiting Afro-descendant youth</p>	



### 3 Social Participation and Strategic Partnerships

#### ACTIONS

Encourage the sharing of experiences among national Afro-descendant organizations

Encourage the sharing of experiences among international Afro-descendant organizations

Promote the creation and strengthening of partnerships to generate interinstitutional national working groups with Afro-descendant youth

Support the organization of national and sub-national intergenerational forums enabling the effective participation of Afro-descendant youth in decision-making forums

Create a social participation methodology for young people at the grassroots level that is attractive and appropriate to their expectations and interests

## 4 Recognition of traditional Afro-Descendant medicine and ancestral knowledge

GOAL	RESULTS	
Raise awareness among Afro-descendant youth regarding the value of traditional Afro-descendant medicine as part of their cultural roots	Systematization of the use, acceptance, and regulation at the national level of traditional medicine and ancestral knowledge	
	Dissemination of the presence and importance of ancestral knowledge and traditional Afro-descendant medicine	
	Support the recognition of traditional medicine	

## 4 Recognition of traditional Afro-Descendant medicine and ancestral knowledge

### ACTIONS

Encourage countries to map and systematize, from the ground up, the use and acceptance of traditional medicine

Encourage countries to map and systematize health centers that practice traditional medicine

Promote intergenerational forums between Afro-descendant youth, elders, and community leaders

Popularize use of social networks to disseminate this kind of knowledge among Afro-descendant youth

Create and disseminate short documentaries and infographics, with the participation of Afro-descendant youth

Promote the recognition and implementation of the knowledge and practices of traditional Afro-descendant medicine in national, regional, and local health systems

Provide support by regulating the use of traditional Afro-descendant medicine in health systems

## 5 Capacity-Building at All Levels

GOAL	RESULTS	
<p>Guarantee and manage culturally relevant health care</p>	<p>Incorporation of Afro-descendant youth into technical and professional health careers</p>	
	<p>Culturally relevant health care with a gender and human rights approach</p>	
	<p>Incorporation of the Afro-descendant community's major structural issues and the impact of racism into the curriculum of educational institutions</p>	

## 5 Capacity-Building at All Levels

### ACTIONS

Forge partnerships to promote health careers in Afro-descendant schools and communities

Promote affirmative action, scholarships, and training quotas in health education and health careers for Afro-descendant youth.

Promote and support training for health workers and administrative staff at all levels in interculturalism, from a human rights perspective and using a gender approach

Promote human rights-based anti-discrimination campaigns for equitable treatment in health care (sample message: “Afro-descendant youth are welcome here”)

Promote awareness campaigns in health science education centers on the health problems of Afro-descendant youth, focusing on their sexual and reproductive health and mental health

Promote youth forums to identify the main access barriers to comprehensive health care and to generate proposals for transformation







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