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PAHO/WHO COLLABORATING CENTERS

Background

1. The World Health Organization (WHO) often requires expert advice and engages in scientific or technical cooperation with other institutions. WHO Collaborating Centers (CCs) are “institutions that have been solid WHO allies for years, helping WHO to implement its mandated work and achieve its current goals. WHO Collaborating Centers cooperate with WHO on a diverse range of activities such as collecting data for a report, organizing a meeting or developing a guideline” (1). For historical reasons specific to the Pan American Health Organization (PAHO), WHO Collaborating Centers located in the Region of the Americas are known as PAHO/WHO Collaborating Centers.

2. The collaboration brings benefits to both parties. PAHO gains access to top institutions worldwide and the institutional capacity to support its work. For their part, the PAHO/WHO Collaborating Centers gain increased visibility and recognition for the health issues they work on, opportunities to network, and the possibility of mobilizing additional resources.

3. In September 2017, Document CSP29/INF/2, PAHO/WHO Collaborating Centers, was presented to the 29th Pan American Sanitary Conference. It provided Member States with an overview of the PAHO/WHO Collaborating Centers in the Americas and their linkages with the PAHO Strategic Plan, as well as with the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). Member States appreciated the information presented and encouraged the Pan American Sanitary Bureau (PASB) to keep them informed through future meetings of the Governing Bodies (2).

Geographic Distribution of the PAHO/WHO Collaborating Centers in the Region of the Americas

4. As of 11 May 2021, there are 181 Collaborating Centers in the Americas. They are distributed as follows: Argentina, 13; Brazil, 19; Canada, 32; Chile, 6; Colombia, 4; Costa Rica, 1; Cuba, 9; Grenada, 1; Honduras, 1; Jamaica, 1; Mexico, 14; Peru, 1; Puerto Rico, 1; Trinidad and Tobago, 2; United States of America, 74; and Uruguay, 2 (3, 4).

Alignment of CC Workplans with WHO and PAHO Guiding Documents and the Sustainable Development Goals

5. Since 2017, PASB has explicitly linked each Collaborating Center workplan to components of the WHO Thirteenth General Programme of Work 2019-2023 and the PAHO Strategic Plans 2014-2019 and 2020-2025 to ensure that the Collaborating Center workplans are aligned with these guiding documents (5). PASB has also aligned each CC workplan with goals of the Sustainable Health Agenda for the Americas 2018-2030 (6). These linkages and further details can be consulted on the PAHO/WHO Collaborating Centers website.¹

6. The Collaborating Center workplans are also aligned with specific targets of SDGs 3, 16, and 17 (7). It is important to recognize the Collaborating Center mechanism as a contribution to the achievement of the SDGs, particularly Goal 17, target 6: “Enhance North-South, South-South and triangular regional and international cooperation on and access to science, technology and innovation and enhance knowledge sharing on mutually agreed terms, including through improved coordination among existing mechanisms, in particular at the United Nations level, and through a global technology facilitation mechanism.”²

Tools, Processes, and Guidelines for Development of Collaborating Center Workplans

7. The alignment of Collaborating Center workplans with the Organization’s goals and mandates, expressed through its various guiding instruments, is essential to ensure that deliverables received from the Collaborating Centers are strategic and provide tangible evidence that these partnerships are beneficial to the public health goals of the Region. Toward this end, PASB provides innovative tools, processes, and guidelines to support its technical areas and the Collaborating Centers in the development of workplans that are clear, concise, and plainly demonstrate the linkage of each activity to the Organization’s mandates.

8. These tools and processes include templates, email listservs, a strategic decision-making instrument, and ongoing training for both Collaborating Centers and PASB staff. The adoption of the Framework of Engagement with Non-State Actors (FENSA) by WHO in 2016 (8) brought about further scrutiny, not only to protect both WHO and PAHO from potential risks but to help ensure that workplans are directly aligned with their goals and mandates (9). A description of the processes and guidelines can be found in Annex A.

¹ More information available at: www.paho.org/en/pahowho-collaborating-centres/spotlight-pahowho-collaborating-centres.

² Information on SDG 17, target 6, available at: https://sdgs.un.org/goals/goal17#targets_and_indicators.

Visibility of Specific and Tangible Results

9. As mentioned above, PASB presented information documents on Collaborating Centers during the Governing Bodies meetings held in 2017, providing a general overview of this partnership mechanism and its scope and purpose. Member States encouraged PASB to show specific and tangible results of this type of partnership.

10. Accordingly, in 2019 PASB launched an initiative, Identifying the Most Important Deliverables: A Study of PAHO/WHO Collaborating Centers. The study sought to bring more visibility to the work of the Collaborating Centers and to demonstrate how this collaboration is contributing to the achievement of both WHO and PAHO's plans and programs, and ultimately to their priorities and mandates.

11. During this initiative, surveys and interviews were conducted with 68 PASB staff who coordinate the work with one or more Collaborating Centers. The survey covered all 187 Collaborating Centers then operating, for a 100% response rate. The results showed that 77% of the Collaborating Centers provided training, education, and capacity-building activities; 56% provided technical advice; 55% generated and published technical reports, articles, and book chapters; 48% collected, organized, and disseminated information through web-based products; 34% conducted research projects; 13% provided reference substances, standardization of terminology and nomenclature, and other laboratory activities; and 5% responded to outbreaks and emergencies (10). Using the results of the initiative, PASB developed 56 web notes and 13 video interviews that can be found on the PAHO/WHO Collaborating Centers website under "Spotlight on PAHO/WHO Collaborating Centers."³ Given the success of the initial video interviews, PASB has created eight additional videos and a YouTube playlist⁴ to showcase the work of the Collaborating Centers.

12. In addition, detailed summaries of the interviews conducted with PASB staff were made available for internal use as a baseline to help technical departments make future decisions about Collaborating Centers (e.g., a decision on whether to redesignate a CC). This initiative also highlighted best practices and challenges faced by PASB staff and gave the Organization an opportunity to compile recommended actions for the future.

13. The final report of this assessment (10) provides additional details about its methodology and findings. Building on this momentum, PASB launched in 2020 a PAHO/WHO Collaborating Centers newsletter designed to bring more attention to the specific activities that Collaborating Centers are conducting. The newsletter is intended for PASB personnel, as well as external audiences, to heighten understanding of how

³ More information available at:
www.paho.org/en/pahowho-collaborating-centres/spotlight-pahowho-collaborating-centres.

⁴ More information available at:
<https://www.youtube.com/playlist?list=PL6hS8Moik7ktpqtOAIv2aOGUfY5Rw1MHf>.

Collaborating Centers are contributing to the Organization's work. Three issues of the newsletter have been disseminated to date.⁵

COVID-19 Response and the Support from Collaborating Centers

14. In the Organization's response to the COVID-19 pandemic, Collaborating Centers have proven to be an asset, supporting PASB through a variety of activities. Although none of the Collaborating Center workplans developed prior to 2020 included COVID-19 support, at least 15 Collaborating Centers quickly reoriented their efforts. They created and published training modules, guidelines for use of personal protection equipment (PPE) and for care of the elderly, and a variety of factsheets, podcasts, articles, studies, reference materials, databases, and webinars relevant to COVID-19. They also developed diagnostic tools and protocols. A brief list of some of these can be found in Annex B.

15. Given the expertise already identified in the Collaborating Centers, the working relationships that PASB had established, and ability of these agile institutions to change course quickly, the Organization was able to receive invaluable support for its efforts to tackle the many new and unknown challenges of the COVID-19 pandemic. Most importantly, these resources and knowledge were made available to the Region as a whole and, in many cases, beyond the Region to achieve global impact. New Collaborating Center workplans are currently being drafted to include activities related to COVID-19 from different technical perspectives.

Lessons Learned and Future Outlook

16. Over the past four years, PASB has continued to strengthen its relationships with Collaborating Centers throughout the Region. PASB has supported Collaborating Centers in developing a clear understanding of what it means to be designated as a Collaborating Center. It has recognized the commitment of these institutions and raised the visibility of their deliverables and their contributions to the Organization's mandates and mission.

17. WHO published an evaluation of its work with Collaborating Centers in May 2020 (11). In accordance with the findings, PASB is committed to implementing the following recommendations:

- Develop and disseminate a strategic framework and roadmap for working with Collaborating Centers.
- Continue to promote awareness of Collaborating Centers and their contributions, both within PASB and with external audiences.
- Strengthen and enhance the communication and working relations between PASB and the Collaborating Centers.

⁵ More information at: <https://www.paho.org/en/pahowho-collaborating-centres> (News section).

Action by the Executive Committee

18. The Executive Committee is invited to take note of this report and provide any comments it deems pertinent.

Annexes

References

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Annex A

Overview of innovative processes and guidelines developed by PASB for the Collaborating Centers

Process/Guideline	Purpose
Workplan template and internal review process applied to every Collaborating Center	To support staff and Collaborating Centers in the development of each workplan, ensuring adherence to WHO requirements and alignment with PASB mandates.
<p>An email listserv with 300 subscribers, “Directors of Collaborating Centers in the Americas”</p> <p>An email listserv with 70 subscribers for PASB staff, “PAHO/WHO Collaborating Centers Network for Information Sharing”</p>	To keep Collaborating Center Directors and PASB staff informed about changes in the Organization’s processes and guidelines related to Collaborating Centers, and to disseminate information quickly and efficiently.
Collaborating Center Strategic Assessment Instrument	To ensure that managers are actively involved in the decision-making process, are making strategic decisions, and are verifying that deliverables are aligned with the Organization’s mandates during the redesignation process.
Training for PASB staff and Collaborating Centers	To ensure that both staff and Collaborating Centers have a clear understanding of the scope, vision, and expectations for this type of partnership. PASB carries out approximately 80 training sessions per year.
Self-guided training tutorials	To deliver information and step-by-step instructions directly to PASB staff about the process used to designate and redesignate Collaborating Centers.
Status reports of Collaborating Centers by Member State and by Strategic Plan outcome	To inform PASB of the current status of Collaborating Centers in the Americas.
Two dedicated websites for internal and external audiences	To provide information about Collaborating Centers and their vision, purpose, and scope.

Annex B

Selected examples of how Collaborating Centers are supporting PASB in the COVID-19 response

Deliverable	Impact
Train-the-trainer school mental health literacy program in Jamaica	Provides educators with skills in early detection and management of mental health issues for the eventual return to classrooms. Encourages health-seeking behavior to decrease stigma and increase early intervention. Virtual program gives ability to reach a large audience. ¹
Articles and studies related to: <i>a)</i> alcohol consumption during COVID-19, and <i>b)</i> alcohol policy agenda	Provides information on the need to evaluate the impact of COVID-19 containment measures on alcohol availability, consumption, harms, and policies. ² Provides information on the need to monitor consumption levels both during and after the COVID-19 pandemic to better understand the effects of COVID-19 on different groups, as well as to distinguish these effects from those arising from existing alcohol control policies. ³
Molecular detection protocol to simultaneously detect influenza and SARS-CoV-2	Gives the ability to diagnose with one sample both influenza and SARS-CoV-2 viruses in different settings. ⁴

¹ CAN-32 PAHO/WHO Collaborating Center for Research and Training in Mental Health. Available at: <https://youtu.be/sd8QCIG9hVQ>.

² Journal of Alcohol and Drugs website. Available at: <https://www.jsad.com/doi/full/10.15288/jsad.2020.81.297>.

³ Alcohol use in times of the COVID-19: Implications for monitoring and policy. Available at: <https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/full/10.1111/dar.13074>.

⁴ PAHO/WHO Collaborating Centre for Surveillance, Epidemiology and Control of Influenza (CDC). Available at: <https://youtu.be/uSXY1bAolX4>.

Deliverable	Impact
Technical recommendations for molecular lab diagnostics; tool to standardize protocols on transportation of COVID-19 test samples; and videos on proper PPE usage	Molecular diagnostic technique permitted accelerated implementation for the whole Region from the beginning of the pandemic. Served as a model for laboratory quality and security standards for the Region. ⁵
Virtual training and capacity building during COVID-19 pandemic on a variety of topics related to antimicrobial resistance	Courses were transferred to a virtual format, giving access to many participants. This included a course on the identification and detection of <i>Candida</i> fungus, with more than 1,000 participants worldwide. ⁶

⁵ Centro Colaborador de la OPS/OMS para la bioseguridad y la gestión de calidad en los laboratorios. Available in Spanish at: https://youtu.be/aEJeW8lum_Y.

⁶ ARG-43 PAHO/WHO Collaborating Centre on Antimicrobial Resistance Surveillance. Available in Spanish at: <https://youtu.be/y2cNaVLtRTo>.