

# 172nd SESSION OF THE EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE

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*Provisional Agenda Item 7.11-B*

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## SUBREGIONAL ORGANIZATIONS

### Introduction

1. Subregional technical cooperation is supported by Resolution CD45.R6 on the Regional Program Budget Policy, adopted by the 45th Directing Council of the Pan American Health Organization (PAHO) in 2004. After adopting the resolution, subregional technical cooperation was included in PAHO's Budget Policy (Document CD57/5) to promote stronger collaboration between PAHO and integration processes in three subregions: the Caribbean, Central America, and South America.

2. The objective of this document is to inform Member States about public health-related agreements and resolutions emanating from the integration mechanisms since the last report, presented in 2022, within the framework of the subregional integration processes of interest to PAHO's Governing Bodies. This document also covers progress made on activities that were part of cooperation agreements between PAHO and subregional integration entities.

### Caribbean Integration Entities

#### *Caribbean Community*

3. The Caribbean Community (CARICOM) is a grouping of 20 countries: 15 Member States and five Associate Members. It was founded in July 1973 with the signing of the Treaty of Chaguaramas, which establishes a structure consisting of organs, bodies, and institutions. The relationship between PAHO and CARICOM is defined by a memorandum of understanding signed in 1983.

4. The PAHO Subregional Program Coordination Office for the Caribbean is the Organization's main interlocutor with CARICOM. Through policy-making support and technical cooperation offered to various organizations and partners at the subregional level, PAHO is helping to improve the health situation in the Caribbean, in accordance with the PAHO Strategic Plan 2020–2025 and the PAHO Program Budget 2022–2023, and through regional collaboration instruments such as the Caribbean Health Cooperation Initiative (phase IV).

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*Conference of Heads of Government*

5. Between July 2022 and May 2023, two regular meetings of the CARICOM Conference of Heads of Government and one meeting of the Council for Human and Social Development (COHSOD) were held.

6. The Conference of Heads of Government was held from 3 to 5 July 2022 in Paramaribo (Suriname) and was chaired by the President of Suriname. The Heads of Government addressed the following topics:

- a) Regarding COVID-19:
  - i. Multilateral financial institutions recognize the urgent need to assist Member States to strengthen social safety nets following the economic downturn caused by the COVID-19 pandemic.
  - ii. Responsible individual behaviors, vaccination, strengthened health systems, and continued and enhanced vigilance were essential to successfully navigate the COVID-19 pandemic.
  - iii. Measures were put in place to reduce the impact of COVID-19 considering the incidence of long COVID, which could result a significant increase in the prevalence of chronic illness and disability and could potentially further overwhelm the health sector.
  - iv. The post-pandemic period presents an opportunity to restructure health care services and public health programs using lessons learned during the pandemic.
  
- b) Regarding advancement of the CARICOM agri-food systems agenda:
  - i. The Heads of Government received an update on the progress made by the Ministerial Task Force on Food Production and Food Security in advancing the CARICOM Agri-food Systems Agenda, to address current food security challenges and rising food prices, and to achieve Vision 25x2025: reducing by 25% the cost of food imports by 25% by 2025.
  - ii. It was noted that a majority of Member States have set their national targets, which will contribute to the attainment of the 25 goals of Vision 25x2025 and have presented them to the ministerial working group.
  - iii. The Heads of Government commended the President of Guyana for the success of the CARICOM Agri-Investment Forum and Expo held in Guyana and endorsed the Action Plan and Outcome Statement of the event. The Statement called for priority actions to be centered around four main areas: food insecurity, regional transportation, trade barriers, and women and youth in agriculture.

- c) Regarding climate change, the Heads of Government:
- i. Called for the simplification and streamlining of access criteria across donors and multilateral funds to accelerate the financing of climate initiatives in the Region, considering the special circumstances of Small Island Developing States.
  - ii. Agreed to adopt a strategic program of action to scale up climate finance to build resilient economies and societies.
  - iii. Called for early adoption and implementation of a climate vulnerability and resilience framework, to improve access to more bilateral and multilateral climate finance by Small Island Developing States, such as those in CARICOM, which bear the greatest impact of climate change.
  - iv. Acknowledged the Caribbean Development Bank's Recovery Duration Adjustor model and requested that the model be considered by the meeting of the Council of Finance and Planning in August 2022.

*Council for Human and Social Development*

7. The 43rd meeting of the COHSOD was held from 23 to 25 September 2022 in Washington, D.C. (United States). The main points of discussion and decisions were as follows:

- a) *The COVID-19 pandemic, the monkeypox outbreak, and access to vaccines.* The meeting was asked to note the significant decline in the childhood vaccination coverage and recognize the Caribbean's exposure to the significant risk of measles importation; and to commit to identifying and implementing innovative and creative ways of managing COVID-19 and monkeypox without negatively impacting the human resources and activities of the Expanded Program on Immunization.
- b) *Updates on regional initiatives to address the Port of Spain Declaration on Noncommunicable Diseases.* Ministers heard a report on the regional progress towards tobacco control under the World Health Organization Framework Convention on Tobacco Control (WHO FCTC), which underlined the limited progress in the implementation of cost-effective tobacco control measures in line with the WHO FCTC in this subregion. The lack of data on the tobacco epidemic in the Caribbean highlighted the need to strengthen health surveillance systems. Support was called for at the highest political level to accelerate the adoption and implementation of effective and comprehensive measures to reduce tobacco use. There was agreement to work towards the prohibition of production, importation, distribution, sale, and use of partially hydrogenated oils in CARICOM Member States. A commitment was made to develop a policy position and to work towards putting in place regulations and legislation banning partially hydrogenated oils by December 2024. The meeting mandated the Inter-Governmental Working Group

on Unhealthy Diets and Obesogenic Food Environments, with support from PAHO and other collaborating partners and countries, to assist Member States in their plans to eliminate partially hydrogenated oils from the Region's food supply by 31 December 2025.

- c) *Health system matters*. The Caribbean Cardiac Society presented a national capacity self-assessment tool for the management of acute myocardial infarction. Additionally, PAHO submitted a draft questionnaire on the provision and financing of health care in the Caribbean Community.
- d) *Strengthening human resources for health (HRH)*. Ministers received updates on the implementation of a policy brief on interventions to strengthen HRH response to health emergencies, including the COVID-19 pandemic and emerging pandemics in the Caribbean. The Ministers called for the establishment of the permanent Commission on Human Resources for Health in the Caribbean, a collaborative effort between PAHO and CARICOM to build on the successes of its predecessor, the HRH Action Task Force.
- e) *Antimicrobial resistance (AMR)*. Member States were also informed of the implementation of action plans to address antimicrobial resistance. New AMR challenges will urgently require the strengthening of all AMR prevention and containment interventions, as well as new tools and access to and evaluation of new drugs.

## **Central American integration entities**

### ***Central American Integration System***

8. The Central American Integration System (SICA) is the institutional integration framework of the Central American region. It was established on 13 December 1991 under the Protocol to the Charter of the Organization of Central American States (OCAS), or Tegucigalpa Protocol, signed by the States of Costa Rica, El Salvador, Guatemala, Honduras, Nicaragua, and Panama. Belize (2000) and the Dominican Republic (2013) joined later as full members.

9. SICA operates through various organs and secretariats, and the Bureau participates in several activities with some of them, especially those related to health, environment, social affairs, municipalities and communities, education, Afrodescendant populations, and indigenous populations. Most activities are jointly implemented with the Executive Secretariat of the Council of Ministers of Health of Central America and the Dominican Republic (SE-COMISCA) and the Central American Commission on Environment and Development (CCAD).

***Council of Ministers of Health of Central America and the Dominican Republic***

10. The Council of Ministers of Health of Central America and the Dominican Republic (COMISCA) is part of SICA, and its purpose is to identify and prioritize health issues in the subregion. COMISCA normally convenes every six months and is the main subregional forum for analysis, deliberation, and presentation of proposals by the health ministers. Its current strategic plan, the Health Plan of Central America and the Dominican Republic 2021–2025, maintains a vision focused on social determinants of health, achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals, the population approach, health promotion, integrality, and intersectoriality, in a manner consistent with the provisions of the Health Agenda of Central America and the Dominican Republic 2019–2030, highlighting issues such as the environment, climate change, cross-border risks, and social participation, among others.

11. The Health Cooperation Strategy for Central America and the Dominican Republic 2019–2025, signed by PAHO and SE-COMISCA, is a medium-term vision that guides PAHO’s technical cooperation with the subregion. This strategy calls for a mid-term evaluation in 2023.

***Regular Meetings of the Council of Ministers of Health***

12. On 9 and 10 June 2022, the 56th Regular Meeting of COMISCA was held in Panama City, under the pro tempore presidency of Panama. PAHO’s support in almost all agenda items was recognized.

13. The 57th Regular Meeting of COMISCA was held on 1 and 2 December 2022, with the Dominican Republic assuming the pro tempore presidency. The following resolutions were adopted:

- a) COMISCA Resolution 09–2022: approving the technical guidelines for access to contraceptive methods in the context of sexual and reproductive health for adolescents in Central America and the Dominican Republic.
- b) COMISCA Resolution 10–2022: regarding human immunodeficiency virus (HIV) infection, instructing the technical bodies and programs of the ministries of health of the SICA Member States to complete, between January 2023 and December 2028, the process of institutionalizing good practices in relation to HIV infection.
- c) COMISCA Resolution 12–2022: approving the Strategy on Medicines and Other Health Technologies for Central America and the Dominican Republic 2023–2027.
- d) COMISCA Resolution 13–2022: approving the Harmonized List of Medicines, 10th version, for processes related to the COMISCA Joint Negotiation.
- e) COMISCA Resolution 14–2022: approving the 2023–2025 action plan of the health promotion strategy in the context of the 2030 Sustainable Development Goals.

- f) COMISCA Resolution 15–2022: instructing SE-COMISCA, in collaboration with PAHO, to support SICA Member States in measuring the performance of essential public health functions, applying a methodology at the subregional level, in order to strengthen national health systems in Central America and the Dominican Republic.

### ***Central American Commission on Environment and Development***

14. The Central American Commission on Environment and Development (CCAD) was established with the mission of developing a regional cooperation and environmental integration regime that contributes to improving the quality of life of the population in its Member States. Its areas of work focus on environmental governance, and it is responsible for coordination of the SICA Regional Environmental Framework Strategy 2021–2025 and the Regional Strategy on Climate Change. Regarding health and the environment, PAHO and CCAD have been working jointly to put together a strategic plan on air quality, climate change, and health.

15. On 26 October 2022, the 67th Special Meeting of the Council of Ministers of CCAD was held in Santo Domingo (Dominican Republic), at which PAHO presented the progress made by the Central American Regional Integrated Program on Climate Change, Air Quality, and Health, which led to the following agreements:

- a) Request that the Executive Secretariat of CCAD carry out the pertinent coordination to convene a course for regional, national, and subnational decision-makers on the economic, social, and health impacts of air quality, with a launch scheduled for November 2022.
- b) Request that the Executive Secretariat of CCAD provide support in the coordination of the necessary actions to prepare an action plan on climate change, air quality, and health.

### ***SICA General Secretariat***

16. Upon election of the Secretary General of SICA on 11 August 2022, PAHO, represented by the Director of the Subregional Program for Central America, paid a courtesy information visit on PAHO’s activities in the subregion and its work with the different SICA secretariats.

### ***Mesoamerica Integration and Development Project***

17. The Mesoamerica Integration and Development Project, or Mesoamerica Project, is a mechanism created by 10 Mesoamerican countries (Belize, Colombia, Costa Rica, Dominican Republic, El Salvador, Guatemala, Honduras, Mexico, Nicaragua, and Panama). Its purpose is to strengthen regional integration and promote economic and social development in the participating countries. The Mesoamerica Project operates through the joint work of the permanent presidency, held by Mexico, and the rotating semi-annual pro tempore presidencies of the other countries. The project was officially established by the presidents and heads of state and government at the Tenth Tuxtla Dialogue and

Agreement Mechanism Summit (2008), focusing on two axes: economic and social. The latter addresses public health, risk management, food safety, and housing issues, among others. The Tuxtla Gutierrez Summit, scheduled for 2022, was postponed, and will likely take place in 2023. Panama assumed the pro tempore presidency for the first half of 2023.

#### *Executive Commission of the Mesoamerica Project*

18. The Executive Commission of the Mesoamerica Project is composed of the presidential commissioners and the commissioner designated by the Prime Minister of Belize. The primary functions of the Executive Commission are to ensure that the objectives of the Mesoamerica Project are met, to submit proposals to the governments, and to monitor Mesoamerica Project activities. The Commission is the political and administrative arm of the Executive Directorate.

19. At the virtual meeting of the Executive Commission held on 19 December 2022, the new director of the Subregional Program for Central America was invited to present her vision for the coming years in the area of health. At the same meeting, the process of electing the director of the Mesoamerica Project for 2023 was presented. The 2023 Executive Commission meeting was held in hybrid mode on 24 February in Panama City.

20. PAHO has participated in practically all the virtual meetings of the Mesoamerica Project and, in particular, in the meetings of the Mesoamerican Public Health System.

#### *Mesoamerican Public Health System*

21. The purpose of the Mesoamerican Public Health System is to respond to the main common challenges in public health and to strengthen national health systems through selected interventions and operational support provided by the Mesoamerican Institute of Public Health. In the field of health, priority has been given to work that advances the Regional Initiative for the Elimination of Malaria in the Central American region, road safety, risk communication, and the International Health Regulations, among others.

#### **South American integration entities**

##### *Andean Community: Andean Health Agency/Hipólito Unanue Agreement*

22. In the Andean Integration System, the Andean Health Agency/Hipólito Unanue Agreement (ORAS-CONHU) acts as executive secretariat for the Meeting of Ministers of Health of the Andean Area (REMSAA). PAHO participates in these meetings as the technical advisory agency on health. An umbrella memorandum of understanding was signed between PAHO and ORAS-CONHU on 16 March 2017 and then extended in 2019 until March 2023. Steps are being taken towards the signing of a new memorandum of understanding between PAHO and ORAS-CONHU. PAHO's Subregional Program for South America is the Organization's main interlocutor with ORAS-CONHU and, through its technical cooperation, PAHO supports the development and implementation of the strategic plan for health integration. The PAHO Strategic Plan 2020–2025 is in complete accordance with the ORAS-CONHU strategic plan for health integration for 2018–2022.

23. The 40th meeting of REMSAA was held in person on 25 November 2022, with the Minister of Health of Ecuador handing over the pro tempore presidency to Peru. At the meeting, several resolutions were adopted, including:

- a) Resolution REMSAA XL/553, approving the Andean Policy for the Prevention and Control of Cancer and creating the respective Andean Committee for Cancer Prevention and Control.
- b) Resolution REMSAA XL/554, approving the Andean Policy for the Reduction of Health Inequalities 2023–2030, which was proposed by the Andean Roundtable for Agreements against Health Inequalities.
- c) Resolution REMSAA XL/555, updating the Andean Policy on Sexual and Reproductive Health for Adolescents, with emphasis on pregnancy prevention.
- d) Resolution REMSAA XL/556, instructing the Andean Committee on Human Resources to update the Andean Policy on Human Resources in Health as well as the 2023–2030 Action Plan.
- e) Resolution REMSAA XL/557, adopting the WHO recommendations for the prevention, diagnosis, and treatment of tuberculosis within the framework of the End TB Strategy.
- f) Resolution REMSAA XL/559, forming the Andean Committee on Renal Health in order to develop a work plan.
- g) Resolution REMSAA XL/560, urging the strengthening of the quality management system of the national public health and epidemiological surveillance laboratories in the Andean countries.
- h) Resolution REMSAA XL/564, re-electing Dr. María del Carmen Calle Dávila as executive secretary of ORAS-CONHU until 2025.

***Southern Common Market: Meeting of Health Ministers of MERCOSUR and Working Subgroup 11 on Health***

24. The highest sectoral body in this area of cooperation is the Meeting of Health Ministers of the Southern Common Market (MERCOSUR: Argentina, Brazil, Paraguay, and Uruguay). The rest of the South American countries are Associate States. The working subgroups are technical bodies made up of representatives of the States Parties of MERCOSUR. Their main objective is the formulation and harmonization of common regulations in MERCOSUR within each area of jurisdiction. The main purpose of Working Subgroup 11 on Health (SGT 11) is to harmonize strategic policies linked with public health and align them with regional priorities, and to develop plans and programs of action for joint implementation.

25. An umbrella memorandum of understanding was signed between PAHO and MERCOSUR on 11 June 2015; it was renewed in 2019 until June 2023, and is currently being extended. New issues were included for which PAHO pledged to provide technical



cooperation. The PAHO Strategic Plan 2020–2025 is entirely coherent with the thematic areas defined in the memorandum of understanding. On 1 July 2022, in Asunción (Paraguay), the 50th Meeting of Health Ministers of MERCOSUR was held, and the pro tempore presidency was transferred to Uruguay. At this meeting, the subregion’s epidemiological status in relation to COVID-19, monkeypox, acute hepatitis and regional COVID-19 vaccine coverage was presented, and the following declarations were reviewed and approved:

- a) Declaration of the Health Ministers of MERCOSUR and the State of Chile on border health.
- b) Declaration of the Health Ministers of MERCOSUR and the State of Chile on international technical cooperation.
- c) Agreement 01/22 on “Tobacco Control Policies in MERCOSUR.”
- d) Agreement 02/22 on “Policy Recommendations for Healthier, More Sustainable, and More Equitable Food Systems.”

26. At the 51st Meeting of Ministers of Health of MERCOSUR, which took place on 25 November 2022 in Uruguay, the subregion’s epidemiological status in relation to COVID-19, monkeypox, and regional vaccination coverage with regard to the COVID-19 vaccine was again presented, and the following agreements and declarations were approved:

- a) Declaration of the Health Ministers of MERCOSUR and the State of Chile on the impact of plastics on human health.
- b) Declaration of the Health Ministers of MERCOSUR and the State of Chile on border vaccination in MERCOSUR.
- c) Declaration of the Health Ministers of MERCOSUR and the State of Chile on the “MERCOSUR Registry of Donation and Transplantation - DONASUR”.

***Forum for the Progress and Integration of South America (PROSUR)***

27. PROSUR is a mechanism and space for dialogue and cooperation among all South American countries to move toward more effective integration and promote the growth, progress, and development of South American countries. Its highest sectoral body is the Meeting of Health Ministers of PROSUR. Currently, eight South American countries have signed the charter of the forum: Argentina, Brazil, Chile, Colombia, Ecuador, Guyana, Paraguay, and Peru. On 27 January 2022, the PROSUR Presidential Summit was held in Cartagena de Indias (Colombia) and, on 21 July of that same year, the 7th PROSUR Meeting of Heads of State and Government and High Authorities was held in Luque (Paraguay).

28. During the pro tempore presidency of Paraguay, the seminar on investment in sustainable vaccine production was held within the framework of PROSUR's project for scaling immunization capacity, with the objective of analyzing the status of regional vaccine production and the role of States to sustainably increase production. The event was organized by the Ministry of Health and Social Protection, the Presidential Agency for International Cooperation, and the Ministry of Trade, Industry, and Tourism of Colombia, together with the pro tempore presidency of Paraguay and with the support of the Inter-American Development Bank and PAHO/WHO. It was attended by technical officials from several countries, including Argentina, Brazil, Chile, Colombia, Ecuador, Paraguay, and Peru.

**Action by the Executive Committee**

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

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