

SPEECH BY PAHO/WHO DIRECTOR DR. JARBAS BARBOSA FOR THE “INVESTING IN THE RADICAL REORIENTATION OF HEALTH SYSTEMS TOWARDS PRIMARY HEALTH CARE: THE BEST AND ONLY CHOICE TO ACHIEVE UNIVERSAL HEALTH COVERAGE” EVENT

21 SEPTEMBER 2023

Your excellency, President Boric, President of the Republic of Chile,

Dr Tedros, Director General of the World Health Organization,

Distinguished Ministers of Health, representatives of PAHO/WHO Member States, leaders in public health from academia, the private sector, and civil society, ladies and gentlemen.

I extend my heartfelt congratulations to Chile for hosting this highly timely and relevant event.

In a world that is continually reshaping, our discussion today holds immense importance.

The concept of reorienting health systems towards Primary Health Care, or PHC, is not only politically and technically feasible, it has become imperative in the wake of the profound global impact of the COVID-19 pandemic.

At this UN General Assembly, we stand at a crossroads, recognizing the urgency of transforming our health systems to become more resilient, inclusive, and well-prepared.

In the Americas, our Member States are embarking on profound health sector reforms, to improve access to health, and build resilience within health systems and societies.

In the light of these challenges, as the Director of PAHO, I have set forth two strategic axes for our collective work in the Americas, scaling our action to transform health systems based on Primary Health Care.

Firstly, our path to recovery, resilience and equity rests on prioritizing Access, Coverage, and Quality.

The identification of barriers to access – geographical, financial, cultural, and administrative– must drive our action in Primary Health Care.

It guides us in ensuring effective coverage, where people have access to the comprehensive health services they need, integrated at every level of care, throughout their life.

With quality embedded in all we do: from service delivery to patient engagement where quality processes improve health outcomes, from maternal mortality to the control of NCDs.

In the Americas, we are translating political declaration to action at the national level.

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Chile is an excellent example for all, whereby under the leadership of President Boric and Minister Aguilera, and with the support of PAHO/WHO, we have witnessed a rapid expansion in Primary Health Care.

I am urging all our Member States to take similar action, to Invest, Innovate and Implement PHC.

Investment in primary health care is essential. In our healthcare institutions, in service delivery and digital health, and most importantly, in people.

Hear, a note of caution. Our health workforce constitutes a major determinant of access that requires immediate attention, and investing in a fit for purpose workforce in family medicine and primary care is paramount if we are to resolve the shortfall of 600,000 health workers in the Americas by 2030.

Furthermore, we need to embrace innovation. In the deployment of health technologies and digital health; in governance, financing, and service delivery.

Lastly, implementation is key. We must go beyond political declarations and aspirational statements and take action. And we must do so now.

This is where a territorial approach to PHC becomes critical. With subnational planning, based on the context of health conditions where people live.

Distinguished leaders, health systems rooted in PHC will benefit every region, country, and community.

That's why PAHO is working with our Member States to make strong PHC a reality for people across the Americas.

Together, by investing, innovating, and implementing, we can forge a path towards transforming health systems and create a healthier future for all.

Thank you.