



## **60th DIRECTING COUNCIL**

**75th SESSION OF THE REGIONAL COMMITTEE OF WHO FOR THE AMERICAS**

*Washington, D.C., USA, 25–29 September 2023*

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**OPENING REMARKS BY THE HON. MR. XAVIER BECERRA,  
SECRETARY OF HEALTH AND HUMAN SERVICES OF THE UNITED STATES OF AMERICA**

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**25 September 2023**

**60th Directing Council of PAHO  
75th Session of the WHO Regional Committee for the Americas**

Hon. Dr. Tufton  
Director Barbosa  
Esteemed fellow Ministers and friends, distinguished leaders, and delegates

Good morning and welcome to Washington, D.C. Thank you first and foremost to Dr. Barbosa and Honorable Dr. Tufton for bringing the American family together today for this 60th Session of the PAHO Directing Council.

For six decades, PAHO has been tested and has risen to meet every challenge put in front of it.

The United States believes in PAHO's mission, that is to ensure good health in the Americas, and we are committed to a continued partnership with our friends in PAHO.

Together, we are working to strengthen health systems to improve access to quality health services for all.

Last week at the United Nations (UN) General Assembly, we all made clear that universal health coverage (UHC) is an essential building block toward achieving global health equity, strengthening global health security, and preventing future pandemics.

The United States joins the global community in urging action to get back on track in all critical UHC areas and restoring essential health services to levels that are better than before the pandemic.

We are strongly committed here in the U.S. to both the Pandemic Accord negotiations and the process to strengthen the International Health Regulations (IHR) (2005), because diseases know no boundaries.

We know all too well no country can do this work entirely on its own. The health of one nation, or one population, is tied to the health of others. Cooperation is critical in everything we do.

Further, we cannot overlook the impact the past three years has had on mental health.

As part of his domestic unity agenda, President Biden, here in the U.S., has released a comprehensive national strategy to transform how mental health is understood, accessed, treated, and integrated in and out of health care settings.

We have also invested in expanding and diversifying our health workforce to meet growing needs.

In all this work, we must include the voices of women, the under-represented, and LGBTQIA+ populations in our decision-making.

And we must meaningfully include all people, in all their diversity, and reject policies that hinder their access to care because of bias, discrimination, or stigma.

We welcome PAHO's leadership in introducing four new policy documents for consideration by this Directing Council on these issues, to pave the way for improved access to health services across the American Region.

Finally, the Biden-Harris administration is committed to addressing the effects of climate change on health; we in the health sector have a critical role to play both in reducing emissions but also, and very importantly, in helping our communities adapt and prepare for the impacts of climate change.

Every day we distance ourselves a bit more from the grimace toll of the pandemic. We now face a critical inflection point. Will we recommit to investing in essential health services and preparedness and response to accelerate our collective progress throughout the Region? The answer for our American family must be "yes."

We must work together to make progress on our shared health goals.

Delay and hesitation are not our friends. Together, we must get this done, I believe we will.

Thank you very much.

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