

SUBREGIONAL ORGANIZATIONS

Introduction

1. Subregional technical cooperation, supported by documents and resolutions adopted by the Governing Bodies of the Pan American Health Organization (PAHO), aims to promote stronger collaboration between PAHO and integration processes in 3 subregions: the Caribbean, Central America, and South America.
2. The Pan American Sanitary Bureau (PASB) provides technical cooperation to the subregional integration organizations listed below. Each subregion has work plans with resource allocation. These biennial work plans are aligned with the outcomes and outputs of the PAHO Strategic Plan 2020–2025 and are regularly monitored, with reporting every 6 months.
3. 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 2023, within the framework of the subregional integration processes of interest to the Governing Bodies of PAHO. This document also covers progress made on activities that were part of cooperation agreements between PAHO and subregional integration entities.
4. As the result of a comprehensive review of the modalities of cooperation at all levels of the Organization, a new approach to the management of subregional technical cooperation was defined as of 1 January 2024. Under this new modality, subregional technical cooperation for Central and South America is conducted through PASB-led regional initiatives, but technical focal points remain in PAHO/WHO country offices in El Salvador and Peru. Furthermore, in countries where integration institutions are based, and in those acting as pro tempore president of a subregional integration agency, the participation of country offices has been strengthened. The Caribbean cooperation modality is currently under review.
5. These changes are in line with PASB's vision and commitment to harmonize and strengthen PAHO's subregional coordination and cooperation, while considering the constantly evolving national, subregional, and regional contexts. This new approach streamlines links with the teams that respond to requests for technical cooperation and strengthens the strategic/political approach.

Caribbean Integration Entities

Caribbean Community

6. The Caribbean Community (CARICOM) is a group of 20 countries: 15 Member States and 5 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.

7. 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 corresponding program and budget, and through regional collaboration instruments such as the Caribbean Health Cooperation Initiative (phase IV).

Conference of Heads of Government

8. Between July 2023 and February 2024, 2 regular meetings of the CARICOM Conference of Heads of Government were held. These are listed below in chronological order.

9. To mark the 50th anniversary of the signing of the Treaty of Chaguaramas and the creation of CARICOM in 1973, the 45th Regular Meeting of the Conference of Heads of Government of CARICOM was held from 3 to 5 July 2023 in Trinidad and Tobago. The meeting was chaired by the Prime Minister of Dominica. The Heads of Government addressed the following topics:

- a) Regarding the CARICOM Single Market and Economy, the Heads of Government:
 - i. Received an update from the Prime Minister of Barbados, head of the CARICOM Single Market and Economy, on the progress made in its implementation.
 - ii. Agreed to work towards the free movement of all citizens of CARICOM member countries within the organization's territory. They recognized that all citizens of CARICOM countries deserve certain basic guarantees when exercising their right to free movement and to remain indefinitely in another member country.
- b) Regarding advancement of the CARICOM agri-food systems agenda, the Heads of Government:
 - i. Congratulated the President of Guyana for his leadership, as Chief of Agriculture, Agricultural Diversification and Food Security in the CARICOM Quasi-Cabinet, in moving towards achievement of the "25 by 2025" initiative on food and nutrition security.
 - ii. Acknowledged the steady progress made on the subregional agri-food systems agenda, which resulted in a reduction, between 2022 and 2023, in the number of people in the subregion who are food insecure.
- c) Regarding climate change, health, and climate financing, the Heads of Government:
 - i. Emphasized the critical need to urgently address financing to respond to the impacts of climate change. To this end, a subcommittee of prime ministers (of Antigua and Barbuda,

Barbados, Guyana, Saint Lucia, Saint Vincent and the Grenadines, and Suriname) was established to define a regional approach in preparation for the 28th session of the Conference of the Parties to the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change.

- iii. Agreed that, in order to protect the viability of keeping temperature rise under the target of 1.5°C, the subregion would need a robust political advocacy effort in the following key areas: financing adaptations, as well as losses and damage; improving access to financing for small island developing States; risk reduction; sustainable debt; and innovation.
- d) Regarding Haiti, the Heads of Government addressed the crisis in the country and noted the urgent need to open a humanitarian aid corridor and increase security in order to stabilize the situation through a United Nations Security Council resolution. They agreed to seek the support of international partners to obtain funding to establish this corridor and strengthen security in Haiti.

10. The 46th Regular Meeting of the CARICOM Conference of Heads of Government was held from 25 to 28 February 2024 in Guyana. The main topics of the meeting were the CARICOM Single Market and Economy, agriculture and food/nutrition security, climate change and financing to respond to its impacts, regional security, preparations for the International Cricket Council T20 World Cup in June 2024, and regional transportation and repairs.

Council for Human and Social Development

11. The 45th regular session of the Council for Human and Social Development was held on 23–24 September 2023 in Washington, D.C., United States of America. In his opening remarks, Dr. Jarbas Barbosa, Director of PAHO, highlighted some of the priority health challenges in the subregion that require a joint response. These include successful implementation of evidence-based standards on front-of-pack labeling, agreement on cross-border measures for communicable disease control, and improving the availability of health workers throughout the Caribbean. The Director congratulated the ministers on signing the Declaration of Nassau during Vaccination Week in the Americas 2023 and expressed PAHO's commitment to ensuring that children are not exposed to vaccine-preventable diseases.

12. During the meeting, the following main topics were discussed:

- a) *Regional health security.* Updates were provided on mpox, cholera, rotavirus gastroenteritis, and other outbreaks; and on strategies to eliminate hepatitis B and C in the Caribbean, leveraging laboratory integration, supply chain optimization, and efforts to address pandemic prevention, preparedness, and response through the Pandemic Fund. The ministers were also updated on the overall status of immunization in the subregion.
- b) *Matters related to the Port of Spain Declaration on Noncommunicable Diseases.* The ministers received an update on the "Caribbean Moves" initiative and on regional prevention, management, and control of noncommunicable diseases through the HEARTS initiative.

- c) *Actions to strengthen human resources for health.* A report was presented on catalytic financing to strengthen the health workforce in the Caribbean, as well as its components, actions, and implementation in 2023; and on strengthening nursing education in the Caribbean through curriculum development, the creation of simulated laboratories, and training for nursing tutors.
- d) *Initiatives to improve access to medicines and health technologies in the Caribbean.* Participants at the meeting were briefed by Barbados' representative in the initiative for pharmaceutical equity for global health, and in the Health Development Partnership for Africa and the Caribbean. A report was also presented on the need to make headway in the assessment and rational use of health technologies, as well as guidance on their use in the Caribbean. A subregional working group was created to update the roadmap on this issue and define strategies to encourage more Caribbean countries to join the Health Technology Assessment Network of the Americas (RedETSA) and the World Health Organization's Evidence-informed Policy Network (EVIPNet).
- e) *Actions to address climate change and health in the Caribbean.* Information was provided on activities being carried out in 16 countries within the framework of the EU/CARIFORUM Climate Change and Health Project.

Central American integration entities

Central American Integration System

13. The Central American Integration System (SICA) is the institutional framework for the integration 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.

14. SICA operates through various organs and secretariats. PAHO/WHO, through the initiative for Central America, cooperates with several of its initiatives, especially those related to health, environment, social affairs, municipalities and communities, education, Afro-descendant populations, and indigenous populations. Most PAHO technical cooperation with SICA is jointly implemented with the Executive Secretariat of the Council of Ministers of Health of Central America and the Dominican Republic (SE-COMISCA), the Central American Commission on Environment and Development (CCAD), and the Central American Parliament.

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

15. 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 6 months and is the main subregional forum for analysis, deliberation, and presentation of proposals by the health ministers.

16. 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. It is coordinated with the Regional Health Plan for Central America and the Dominican Republic 2021–2025, adopted by COMISCA in October 2021. This plan contains the policy framework for promoting progress towards the institutionalization of regional integration in the field of health, and for strengthening the perspective of social determinants of health and intersectorality to address public health problems. It is also coordinated with the Health Agenda for Central America and the Dominican Republic 2019–2030, which highlights issues such as the environment, climate change, cross-border risks, and social participation.

Regular Meetings of the Council of Ministers of Health

17. On 23 September 2023, within the framework of the 60th PAHO Directing Council, a special meeting of COMISCA was held in Washington, D.C., United States of America, with the participation of the Director of PASB, Dr. Jarbas Barbosa. This meeting adopted COMISCA Resolution 08–2023, approving the Regional Health Policy of SICA for the period 2023–2030.

18. On 6–7 December 2023, the 59th Regular Meeting of COMISCA was held under the pro tempore presidency of El Salvador. During the meeting, the pro tempore presidency was transferred to Honduras. The following resolutions were adopted:

- a) COMISCA Resolution 09–2023, addressing the dengue epidemic in SICA member states.
- b) COMISCA Resolution 12–2023, addressing the human immunodeficiency virus (HIV) epidemic in Central America and the Dominican Republic.
- c) COMISCA Resolution 13–2023, approving the prioritized regional indicators for noncommunicable diseases.
- d) COMISCA Resolution 14–2023, on regional labor mobility and building capacities in human resources for health in SICA member states.
- e) COMISCA Resolution 15–2023, approving the guidelines for the prevention and control of infections by multidrug-resistant pathogens in hospital settings in Central America and the Dominican Republic.
- f) COMISCA Resolution 16–2023, addressing priorities in the surveillance of health care for migrant populations.
- g) COMISCA Resolution 17–2023, on the regional approach to the impacts of climate change on public health.

19. The 60th Regular Meeting of COMISCA was held in Tela, Honduras, on 19–20 June 2024. During this session, the pro tempore presidency was transferred from Honduras to Nicaragua and the following resolutions and agreement were adopted:

- a) COMISCA Resolution 01–2024, on entomological surveillance and vector control in SICA member states.

- b) COMISCA Resolution 02–2024, approving the Tuberculosis Strategic Plan for Central America and the Dominican Republic 2024–2029 and a corresponding monitoring and evaluation plan.
- c) COMISCA Resolution 03–2024, defining the Regional Malaria Elimination Initiative (RMEI) for Mesoamerica.
- d) COMISCA Resolution 04–2024, approving the Strategy for Strengthening a Comprehensive Approach to Adolescent Health in Central America and the Dominican Republic 2024–2030.
- e) COMISCA Agreement 01–2024, on strengthening health regulation in SICA member states.

Central American Commission on Environment and Development

20. 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 on a strategic plan to address air quality, climate change, and health.

21. In 2023, with support from PAHO, CCAD implemented the first phase of the Regional Integrated Program on Climate Change, Air Quality, and Health for Central America. Within this context, baselines were established for the state of air quality in Central America and the Dominican Republic, with the corresponding regulatory frameworks; an integrated roadmap on climate change, air quality, and health was established for the SICA region; and progress is being made on the development of a course for regional, national, and subnational decisionmakers on the economic, social, and health impacts of air quality. A model law on the subject is also being prepared, with the assistance of actors such as SE-COMISCA, CCAD, the Climate and Clean Air Coalition, and the United Nations Environment Programme.

Project on temporary labor migration in Central America

22. A project seeking to characterize the movement dynamics and living conditions of temporary migrant workers within the SICA Member States and opportunities to improve the health of these populations is being implemented jointly by SE-COMISCA and PAHO. This South-South cooperation project for health development promotes a strategic, intersectoral approach to the challenges faced by the migrant population engaged in temporary cross-border agricultural labor in the Central American subregion. During the first phase of the project, between May and December 2023, data and information were collected, systematized, and analyzed to characterize the dynamics of temporary work and living conditions in migrant populations. The second phase of the project, in 2024, focuses on the development of public policy recommendations to strengthen the health and living conditions of this population, with emphasis on actions by local governments. The project has allowed the expansion of partnerships with SICA institutions through joint work with the Trifinio Plan.

Central American Parliament

23. The Central American Parliament is the SICA body tasked with planning, analysis, and advisory duties, according to the powers set forth in its constitutive treaty and current protocols. It also proposes legislation in different areas related to health, and thus constitutes a venue for the advancement of the public health agenda in the subregion. As part of a subregional initiative, PAHO coordinates with the Health Commission and other bodies of the Parliament to address issues such as sexual health, reproductive health, transplants, migration and health, telemedicine, and air quality.

Mesoamerica Integration and Development Project

24. 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 Dominican Republic held the pro tempore presidency for the first half of 2024.

25. The Mesoamerica 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 economic and social issues. Social issues include public health, risk management, food safety, and housing, among others. On 26 June 2023, the Mesoamerica Project and SICA signed a Memorandum of Understanding intended to enhance cooperation and complementarity between these 2 entities.

Executive Commission of the Mesoamerica Project

26. The Executive Commission of the Mesoamerica Project is composed of the presidential commissioners and the commissioner designated by the Prime Minister of Belize. Its primary functions are to ensure that the objectives of the Mesoamerica Project are met, submit proposals to the governments, and monitor Mesoamerica Project activities. It is also the political and administrative arm of the Executive Directorate. A new Executive Directorate took office on 18 August 2023 for the period 2023–2027.

27. The Executive Commission relies on the Inter-institutional Technical Group (GTI) for the process of defining and implementing the projects and actions promoted by the Mesoamerica Project. PAHO is part of the GTI along with other institutions, including the Central American Bank for Economic Integration, the Inter-American Development Bank, the Development Bank of Latin America and the Caribbean, SICA entities, the Economic Commission for Latin America, and the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations.

28. Within the framework of the Mesoamerica Project, the Regional Malaria Elimination Initiative (RMEI) is being implemented in accordance with a COMISCA political declaration in June 2013. This initiative has contributed to malaria elimination plans in the subregion. RMEI encourages the adoption of binational cross-border plans between most countries. It is implemented with the participation of the Clinton Health Access Initiative, SE-COMISCA, the Mesoamerica Project, the Inter-American Development Bank, and the health secretariats and ministries of Member States.

29. PAHO regularly participates in meetings of the Executive Commission, in the segment open to GTI member institutions. The support provided by GTI members on the different lines of action was recognized at the meeting held on 4 December 2023 in Bogotá, Colombia (CE-04–2023). At that meeting, PAHO was requested to continue supporting knowledge generation and knowledge sharing activities that strengthen the capacities and technical competencies of the ministries and secretariats of health. This support was reiterated at the first meeting of 2024, held on 6 March in Santo Domingo, Dominican Republic. The second meeting of the Executive Commission was held in June 2024, also in Santo Domingo, during which the pro tempore presidency was transferred from the Dominican Republic to Belize.

South American integration entities

Andean Community: Andean Health Agency/Hipólito Unanue Agreement

30. In the Andean Integration System, the Andean Health Agency/Hipólito Unanue Agreement (ORAS-CONHU) acts as executive secretariat for the Extraordinary 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. On 27 September 2023, a new technical cooperation framework agreement was signed between PAHO and ORAS-CONHU to improve health in the Andean region. The PAHO Strategic Plan 2020–2025 is in complete accordance with the ORAS-CONHU strategic plan for health integration for 2023–2030.

31. The 36th special session of REMSAA was held virtually on 15 August 2023, under the pro tempore presidency of Peru. At the meeting, the following resolutions were adopted:

- a) Resolution REMSAA Ext. XXXVI/1, approving the 2022 Audited Financial Report.
- b) Resolution REMSAA Ext. XXXVI/2, approving the Strategic Plan for Health Integration 2023–2030.
- c) Resolution REMSAA Ext. XXXVI/3, approving the 2023 Annual Operating Plan and Budget.
- d) Resolution REMSAA Ext. XXXVI/4, approving the Andean Roadmap to Improve Cancer Care for Children and Adolescents.
- e) Resolution REMSAA Ext. XXXVI/5, approving the Andean Public Health Policy to Address Chronic Kidney Disease.
- f) Resolution REMSAA Ext. XXXVI/6, approving the Andean Policy for the Reduction of Maternal Deaths.

32. The 37th special session of REMSAA was held virtually on 26 April 2024, under the pro tempore presidency of Peru. The following resolutions were adopted:

- a) Resolution REMSAA Ext. XXXVII/1, approving the 2023 Management Report and Audited Financial Report.
- b) Resolution REMSAA Ext. XXXVII/2, approving the 2024 Annual Operating Plan and Budget for ORAS-CONHU.

- c) Resolution REMSAA Ext. XXXVII/3, approving the Andean Policy for Health Technology Assessment 2024.
- d) Resolution REMSAA Ext. XXXVII/4, approving the Andean Policy on Human Resources for Health 2024.
- e) Resolution REMSAA Ext. XXXVII/5, on digital health.
- f) Resolution REMSAA Ext. XXXVII/6, approving the Andean Policy on Public Health to Strengthen and Achieve Optimal Early Childhood Development.
- g) Resolution REMSAA Ext. XXXVII/7, approving the Andean Plan for the Prevention, Early Detection, and Treatment of Chronic Kidney Disease throughout the Life Course.

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

33. 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 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.

34. PAHO and MERCOSUR signed a memorandum of understanding on 11 June 2015, which in 2019 was renewed until June 2023 and has now been extended through June 2028. 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.

35. At the 53rd Meeting of Ministers of Health of MERCOSUR on 17 November 2023 in Brasilia (Brazil), the pro tempore presidency was transferred from Brazil to Paraguay. Also, the progress made by MERCOSUR in strengthening health systems was presented, as well as the regional epidemiological report on the prioritized diseases. At the meeting, the following agreements and declarations were approved:

- a) Agreement 02/23, on the search for hematopoietic progenitor cell donors.
- b) Agreement 03/23, on international cooperation for health in MERCOSUR border areas.
- c) Agreement 04/23, on climate change and health.
- d) Agreement 05/23, on health surveillance, promotion, and care for the prevention and control of noncommunicable diseases.
- e) Declaration of the Ministers of Health of MERCOSUR and Associated States on sexual and reproductive health.

f) Declaration of the Ministers of Health of MERCOSUR and Associated States on the WHO Intergovernmental Negotiating Body (INB) Process on Pandemic Prevention, Preparedness and Response.

36. At the 54th Meeting of Ministers of Health of MERCOSUR, held on 14 June 2024 in Asunción, Paraguay, the pro tempore presidency was transferred from Paraguay to Uruguay and the following agreements and declarations were approved:

- a) Agreement 01/24, on the coordination of converging agendas for sexually transmitted infections (STI) and sexual and reproductive health throughout MERCOSUR.
- b) Agreement 02/24, on the establishment of an intergovernmental commission to increase regional production capacity for medicines and health technologies (CIECPR).
- c) Agreement 03/24, on cooperation for access to antisera for the treatment of bites and stings from venomous animals.
- d) Agreement 04/24, on the strategic lines of action of the ad hoc committee on mental health.
- e) Declaration on strategic partnerships in health surveillance.
- f) Declaration on strengthening actions and developing guidelines for the care of health sector workers.
- g) Declaration on dengue and other arboviral illnesses.

Action by the Directing Council

37. The Directing Council is invited to take note of this report and provide any comments it deems pertinent.
