

First Interregional Meeting on Strengthening Preparedness for Health Emergencies and Disasters in Cities and Urban Settings

Quito, Ecuador. 15 - 17 October 2024

CONCEPT NOTE

Introduction

According to the United Nations Statistics Division, the Americas region is experiencing steady urbanization, reaching 81% globally in 2018. By 2022, 179,060,000 people will inhabit Central America, and 436,817,000 will inhabit South America. However, more than 293 million people live in Latin America's 86 most populous metropolitan areas. Factors such as rapid urbanization, settlement in at-risk areas, and pronounced inequality increase the vulnerability of populations and create more complex public health and emergency management challenges for urban settings. The COVID-19 pandemic and the high population concentration highlighted cities' susceptibility to the spread of diseases and the occurrence of disasters, underscoring the urgent need to improve preparedness and response to urban health emergencies in Latin America.

In addition, cities in the Americas face unique challenges, such as managing large population volumes, urban mobility, and limited infrastructure, which require specific approaches to emergency preparedness and response. The integration of strategies such as Hospitals Resilient to Emergencies and Disasters supports the construction of a solid framework to strengthen the capacities of the Health Sector in cities, ensuring effective and timely medical care during critical situations. However, coordinated efforts are required in an integrated manner.

In this context, the implementation of the initiative for " Strengthening health emergency and disaster preparedness in cities and urban settings in Latin America and the Caribbean" emerges as a strategic response to address these challenges by Resolution WHA75.7 (May 2022) of WHO, which focuses on strengthening preparedness and response to health emergencies in cities and urban settings and also with Resolution WHA73.8 (November 2020) which called on WHO to focus on the unique vulnerabilities of cities from a health security perspective.

PAHO's Health Emergencies Department (PHE) implemented in 2023 the pilot phase in Tegucigalpa, Quito, and Bogota to identify critical aspects for implementing this mandate in the Region, and it is currently moving forward with the implementation of the initiative in Quito, Bogota, and Cali, based on a comprehensive approach that includes a preliminary diagnosis of the capacities and needs of each city, a feasibility and impact analysis, followed by the formulation of specific roadmaps to strengthen capacities and competencies, in addition to promoting an intersectoral and participatory approach, aligned with the eight key areas identified in the design of the framework at the global level.

In 2024, Quito, Bogota, and Cali will join the initiative, in addition to the projected extension to other cities in Latin America (Guatemala) and the Caribbean (Kingston).

The initiative's main objective is to strengthen health emergency preparedness, response, and recovery capacities at urban levels in Latin America and the Caribbean. It will focus on the Health Sector's resilience to ensure the continuity of its operations, regardless of the type and origin of the hazard.

General Objective of the Meeting

Contribute to the implementation of WHO Resolution WHA75.7 (May 2022) for strengthening preparedness to health emergencies in cities and urban settings.

Specific objectives of the meeting:

- Evaluate the initiative's progress.
- Facilitate the exchange of experiences and lessons learned among participating cities and other regions of the world.
- Participatory formulation of regional strategic lines of work for expanding the initiative in the Region.

Expected results:

1. Progress report on the initiative in cities and urban environments in the Americas, containing:
 - Success stories
 - Critical areas that require greater attention and resources to improve urban resilience.
 - Challenges of the initiative in each participating city.
 - Recommendations for the short and medium term.
2. Interregional strategy to continue strengthening health emergencies and disaster preparedness, including coordination between local governments, subnational levels, and the National Health Authority
3. Establish a community of practice on health emergency and disaster preparedness in cities and urban settings.

Format

Hybrid: Face-to-face and virtual

Audience

- Mayors and officials of key cities in the implementation of the initiative.
- Officials from the Metropolitan District of Quito and other municipalities in Ecuador, responsible for emergency management, urban planning and resilience.
- Risk management officials from the Ministries of Health of Latin America.
- Experts in health emergency and disaster management, with a focus on the urban context and high population density environments.
- Representatives of organizations of people with disabilities and vulnerable groups (children, the elderly, indigenous communities, migrants) as well as other civil society and non-governmental organizations involved in preparations and inclusive planning for emergencies and disasters,
- Professionals and academics in public health, resilience and urban planning, with a focus on risk management in urban environments, including researchers and consultants specialized in adaptation and risk mitigation strategies for cities and metropolitan areas.
- Representatives from the World Health Organization (WHO), and officials from the Pan American Health Organization (PAHO/WHO), as well as representatives from other UN agencies that contribute to preparedness and promote resilience in cities and coordination between local and national governments.