



*executive committee of
the directing council*

PAN AMERICAN
HEALTH
ORGANIZATION

*working party of
the regional committee*

WORLD
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HEALTH AND YOUTH

In 1976, the Executive Committee at its 76th Meeting and the Directing Council at its XXIV Meeting approved resolutions designed to encourage Member Governments to conduct intersectoral programs to meet the health and welfare needs of young persons, bearing in mind the existing problems and specific resources available.

To that end, the Pan American Health Organization was requested to provide technical cooperation in the following areas, among others: analysis of the information available and design of a strategy for the realistic programming of the services required in which the multidisciplinary training of the relevant staff would be emphasized.

The cooperation activities the Pan American Health Organization has been conducting have been institutionalized in programming and budgetary terms in the form of a new regional project (AMRO-1379). The purposes of this project comprise the provision of technical advisory services and support for training and operational research in the area of health and youth.

At this stage, the project will undoubtedly amount to no more than a catalyst that will help promote the expansion of country activities now being undertaken in this field, frequently under programs that are already receiving support from other international agencies, mainly UNICEF and UNFPA, through specific comprehensive community development and promotion and family planning projects giving special emphasis to youth groups.

With a view to expediting and further coordinating the technical support that the Organization should provide in the field of health and youth to the countries that specifically request it, and in order to strengthen activities for the promotion, dissemination and interchange of experiences available at the subregional and regional level, the Director of the Pan American Sanitary Bureau has set up at Headquarters an interdivisional working group.

The priority task of this working group is to analyze the bases of a program strategy that can be gradually applied to the problems of each country in the Region.

The basic elements of this strategy--in line with the recommendations put forward by the WHO Expert Group concerned (Geneva 1976)--should include at least the following:

- Formulation of a national and intersectoral policy for the protection of the health of young people as part of the promotion of family and community welfare. This means enlisting the participation of other sectors, in addition to the health sector, such as education, social security and labor, with a view to joint action in the framework of overall socioeconomic development. At the same time, efforts should be made to formulate or improve the substantive legislation that would institutionalize the process.

- Youth health activities should be embodied at some specific level in the general health programs in each country. It should be borne in mind here that most of the health requirements of young people can be met by primary care services, particularly in the shantytown and rural areas, where it is also important to enlist the participation of young people in their own health care, in the health care of their families, and in the health care activities of the community to which they belong.

- Health care activities may, as the case may be, form part of specific services or programs such as those for maternal, child and school health or for occupational health. In all these instances, it must be borne in mind that the establishment of referral systems can only be envisaged in terms of action by multidisciplinary teams. Access to such systems can be guaranteed only by of an effective regionalized health care organization.

- A significant part of the diseases of youth is closely linked to factors relating to the values, traditions and, in more general terms, the economic and social-cultural structures of different societies, including such phenomena as migration and unemployment, so that the prevention and/or control of health hazards demands an holistic approach to the problems of health and youth. Such an approach is particularly applicable to the increasing prevalence among adolescents and young people in the recent past of unacceptable forms of psycho-sociological behavior in relation, on the one hand, to sexual conduct leading to early and unwanted pregnancies, promiscuity, abortion, prostitution and sexually communicated diseases and, on the other, to distorted forms of family and community life, resulting in violence, alcoholism, smoking and drug addiction.

In this situation, it appears vital to create conditions that will facilitate community participation in the solution of these problems; such participation should take various forms, including the systematic utilization of the communications media, increased opportunities for youth to

participate in recreation, physical development and sport, and in educational, cultural, vocational and work-related activities, together with measures to motivate and promote civic participation.

- Training represents a function of vital importance. It calls not only for curricular, methodological, and technological innovation in the teaching/learning process, but also the development of the ability of the staff to win the confidence of young people, for which purpose youth counseling opportunities should be expanded, representing as they do a function and responsibility that should not be limited to those in the health sector, but in which members of educational institutions, workers' associations, community leaders and, more especially, young people themselves and their families, should also participate.

- Basic promotional activities in the research field are contingent upon improvements in the recording of data currently available relating both to the health requirements of young people and to the scale and epidemiology of particular problems. Only on such a basis can effective systematization and rationalization of activities be achieved, including the adoption of criteria for treatment and care in the event of exposure to high risks, and only on such a basis would it be possible to evaluate the effectiveness and weigh the cost-benefit implications of programs.

It is along these lines that the Pan American Health Organization will continue to provide the technical support services that Member Governments request, within the limitations of its budgetary resources and in the light of the instructions of its Governing Bodies, and in close relation to the specific needs and characteristics of health activities for adolescents and young people.

Among the areas in which the Organization proposes to provide cooperation are the following:

- Promotional and advisory services for national and, at a later stage, subregional, working groups engaged in programming health care for young people.

- Assistance in the improvement of the information available to each country on the health problems of young people and selected publication of bibliographical material.

- Advisory services on the development and training of the necessary human resources and on appropriate biomedical and social research.

- Cooperation for the purpose of institutionalizing coordination of the above-mentioned programs, both with related national intersectoral activities and those based on international collaboration projects.