



*executive committee of  
the directing council*

PAN AMERICAN  
HEALTH  
ORGANIZATION

*working party of  
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WORLD  
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REPORT ON ACTIVITIES IN CONNECTION WITH THE INTERNATIONAL YEAR OF THE CHILD

1. Introduction

In its XXV Meeting the Directing Council adopted Resolution XXVI, reiterating to the Director its recommendation to promote the activities to be carried out in connection with the International Year of the Child, subject to budgetary availabilities and in coordination with other international agencies, and particularly with the United Nations Children's Fund.

2. PAHO Activities in Connection with the International Year of the Child

In the framework of the aforementioned resolution and in close collaboration with other United Nations agencies, during 1979 PAHO pursued an active program of promoting activities for the improvement of child health in the Region under specific programs and in the setting of primary care and educational participation of the community.

This effort consisted essentially in actions of two principal kinds:

- Activities directly concerned with promotion of the International Year of the Child;
- The reinforcement of technical cooperation with countries in the improvement of maternal and child health.

a) Activities Directly Concerned with Promotion of the International Year of the Child

The plan of action prepared and presented to the XXV Meeting of the Directing Council of PAHO stated that the Organization recognized the coordinating role of UNICEF in the celebration of the International Year

of the Child and would collaborate with that agency and with the Member Countries in the events to be held for that purpose in the Region. There were many requests for cooperation, and the Organization responded to them through the attendance of its staff members, and by hiring short-term consultants and furnishing literature and logistical support. In this collaboration it was always sought to view child health as a complement and a product of the development of society as a whole, which was to be promoted mainly through measures taken in the setting of primary health care.

Following are the salient activities carried on specifically in celebration of the International Year of the Child:

- Participation by the Organization, represented by its Director, Dr. Héctor R. Acuña, in the Special Meeting of the Executive Board of the United Nations Children's Fund at Mexico City in May 1979. The Director conveyed to the meeting a message from the Director-General of WHO and from himself, in which he stressed the priorities of cooperation in the field of child health in accordance with the mandates of the Organization's Governing Bodies.
- A document entitled Child Health in the Americas was prepared and published in 1979 as PAHO Scientific Publication No. 381. It includes chapters on mortality and morbidity in children under 10 years of age, and in young people and adolescents, the factors that condition the health of the child, the accessibility and coverage of maternal and child health services, health policies and their relevance to child health, the development of human resources for maternal and child care, perinatal health care, mental health and the psychosocial development of the child, and an assessment of the child health outlook for the eighties. Its annexes consider a number of cases in which countries in the Region have improved child health by applying the strategies of primary care and community participation.
- To encourage the design and use of methods for obtaining more reliable data on child mortality rates, the performance of studies on child mortality and morbidity was encouraged. Guidelines are expected for the direction of possible activities in cooperation with several countries that have expressed interest and are considering the design of specific projects in this field.
- Special attention was given during the year to cooperation in various national and regional activities directed at promoting the development of human resources for maternal and child health care. Salient among these activities were:

- i) A course on educational technologies applied to the health of young people, held at Panama in March;
  - ii) A Latin American course in the administration of maternal and child health, at Medellín, Colombia, from 16 April to 1 June 1979;
  - iii) A course on appropriate perinatal care technologies, at Montevideo, Uruguay, from 28 May to 2 June 1979;
  - iv) A course on perinatal public health, at Montevideo, Uruguay, from 5 to 14 June 1979;
  - v) A South American meeting on social pediatrics, at Santa Fe, Argentina, from 17 to 20 August 1979;
  - vi) A working group on breast-feeding and child nutrition;
  - vii) A Latin American seminar on maternal and child health, at Santiago, Chile, from 24 September to 2 November 1979;
  - viii) A Latin American course in primary child health care, at Santiago, Chile, from 1 October to 15 November 1979;
  - ix) A Latin American meeting on pediatrics, at Brasília, Brazil, from 6 to 12 October 1979;
  - x) An interregional meeting on social sciences research on the Child, at Austin, Texas, from 9 to 13 September 1979;
  - xi) A seminar on the administration of maternal and child programs and family planning, at Costa Rica, in December 1979;
  - xii) A world auxology congress, at Havana, Cuba, in December 1979.
- As a direct contribution to the conduct of programs in the countries, cooperation was provided through short-term consultants who contributed to the design, implementation and evaluation of maternal and child health projects. A total of 42 consultant-months of cooperation was provided in this area during 1979. Under projects of the same kind, fellowships totaling 170 man-months were awarded for professional staff of maternal and child health programs.
  - As a contribution to a fuller understanding of the needs of children among decision-makers, groups with responsibilities in the health field, and public opinion, the Program of Selective Dissemination of Scientific Information was launched in 1979

with the "Child Health" series. The first issue on growth and development, including abstracts from publications entered in automated scientific data systems over the last three years, was distributed in June, and three other issues were put out during the year on the subjects of perinatal health, adolescence and youth, and childhood immunizations.

- Worthy of special mention is the "Regional Program of Perinatal and Maternal and Child Care with Emphasis on the Primary Care of the Family," successfully negotiated with the Kellogg Foundation in late 1979, under which that Foundation has provided an extrabudgetary contribution that makes it possible to support programs for the integration of teaching with care and for operations research in several countries of the Region, and so to set up a network of subprojects in which the principles of primary care and appropriate technologies in health are applied.

b) Reinforcement of Technical Cooperation with Countries for the Improvement of Maternal and Child Health

PAHO has so far been serving as an agency for technical cooperation with 21 countries of the Region receiving financial assistance from the United Nations Fund for Population Activities for the conduct of integrated maternal and child health and family welfare programs. During 1979 special emphasis was placed on their child health content, with particular stress on neonatal care, immunizations, psychosocial stimulation, oral rehydration, and the prevention of respiratory infections. Eight new projects were negotiated and discussed during the year, and some of them are already in execution.

The salient feature of these projects is their contribution to extending the coverage of maternal and child services as part of integrated health services and with special reference to primary health care. The various components of care of the mother and of the child at various ages have been developing progressively with personnel training at all levels, reinforcement of the service infrastructure and the conduct of community education measures directed at the promotion of breast-feeding, good hygiene habits for children, and care of one's own health in beneficiary populations. In several countries the links between traditional medicine and the formal health system are being strengthened so as to extend the coverage of adequate childbirth and neonate care.

Activities for monitoring child growth and development are regarded as central to child health care in these projects. The current trend is to seek better articulation between maternal and child health

and nutrition programs, particularly in regard to monitoring the nutritional status of mothers and children and the promotion of breast-feeding.

Of particular significance was coordination between these projects and activities under the Expanded Program on Immunization. In several countries seminars are being held with the participation of staff of immunization and maternal and child care programs with a view to the setting of common goals, standardization of the rules for care, harmonization of administrative procedures, and improved utilization of funds available at the national level.

Special attention was given to the design of appropriate technologies for perinatal and child care at the primary level. A seminar was held on the subject, which stressed techniques for the detection of risk factors during pregnancy that could be used to implement appropriate levels of care in pregnancy and childbirth, techniques for the inhibition of premature delivery and for reanimation of the depressed neonate, simplified methods for determining the gestational age of neonates, simple methods for diagnosing jaundice in the newborn, and the control of diarrheas (oral rehydration) and common childhood infections. These and other subjects are being investigated with a view to the design of technologies for improving the quality of care at the primary level. Small grants have been awarded to several research groups for the design and evaluation of a variety of technologies suitable for child care.

In the general framework of cooperation between the Organization and its Member Governments, the promotion of mental health measures continued, particularly in connection with the integral development of the child in the psychosocial and emotional aspects, with emphasis on the informed participation of the mother and family. In conjunction with UNESCO, the Organization participated in a working group preparing valuable documentation on the ecological approach to child development.

In accordance with the recommendations of the United Nations General Assembly and the instructions issued by the UNICEF Secretariat for the International Year of the Child, during 1979 PAHO directed its technical cooperation toward the encouragement of concrete measures for child health rather than toward the organization of meetings on the subject. Its entire staff at Headquarters and in the countries, particularly that working in the specific areas, cooperated in the programming, standardization and evaluation of maternal and child activities and services, with emphasis on the extension of immunization coverages, oral rehydration, early stimulation, the epidemiological surveillance of growth and development, and the prevention and timely treatment of pneumopathies and rheumatic fever. These measures add up to

a sizable body of work and are the principal evidence of the effort that PAHO has made to implement its commitment in connection with the International Year of the Child.

### 3. Future Activities

The lively process of intellectual exchanges and the many measures carried out during 1979 have resulted in a clearer identification of the program areas of increasing priority in child health when the prospects of this field are considered in the conceptual framework of the social goal of "health for all by the year 2000." Thus, there emerge areas of need in which there are or soon will be appropriate technologies for channeling technical cooperation activities to improve the health of the child and its family:

- Control of diarrheal diseases;
- Reduction of the prevalence of low birth weight;
- Prevention of undernutrition in children;
- Stimulation of integral development of the child;
- Control of diseases preventable by vaccination;
- Application of the risk approach in perinatal and family care.

This set of child health measures adds a concrete and feasible component to primary care programs which, if they attain total coverage, will significantly improve the quality of life of children in the Region.

The International Year of the Child and the measures taken by the Organization during it constitute a point of departure for the rigorous reinforcement and revitalization of programs and projects in maternal and child health as the keystone for the extension of coverages and the educational participation of the community.