



# World Health Day 1995 Focuses on Immunization

Each year, the 189 member countries of the World Health Organization take advantage of the World Health Day—held on 7 April, the anniversary of the adoption of the WHO constitution—to raise awareness of a specific health issue through programs, activities, and media coverage. The subject chosen by WHO for this year's World Health Day was the worldwide campaign to eradicate polio by the end of the century, under the slogan "Target 2000: A World Without Polio."

With the declaration at the Pan American Sanitary Conference last September that wild poliovirus transmission has been interrupted in this hemisphere, the Region of the Americas has already reached that target.<sup>1</sup> Building on this historic achievement, the Region is moving toward elimination of another scourge of childhood—measles. In the United States, the focus of World Health Day 1995 was expanded to encompass all childhood vaccine-preventable diseases, under the theme "Immunize: Birth to Two, It's Up to You!"

## CELEBRATION AT PAHO

A ceremony in commemoration of World Health Day 1995 was held at PAHO Headquarters in Washington, D.C. The celebration, cosponsored by PAHO, the American Association for World Health (AAWH), and the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, featured the presentation of World Health Day awards, a panel discussion, and a keynote address by Hillary Rodham Clinton, First Lady of the United States of America.

The host of the program was Dr. Richard L. Wittenberg, President and Chief Executive Officer of AAWH, a nonprofit nongovernmental organization that serves to educate about and promote the goals of PAHO/WHO in the United States. Dr. Wittenberg welcomed the many distinguished guests and then introduced Sir George Alleyne, PAHO's Director.

Dr. Alleyne reminded the audience of the remarkable success the polio eradication campaign had achieved in the Americas in the midst of political and social unrest in some of the countries and despite the persistence of poverty in some sectors. He credited, among other things, a high level of political commitment, dedicated community participation, and the collaboration of governmental and nongovernmental organizations, and he pointed out that the polio model must now serve as the template for the measles elimination effort. Noting that not all

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<sup>1</sup>The last case of polio in the Americas caused by indigenous wild poliovirus occurred in Peru in August 1991. Since that time, intensive surveillance of acute flaccid paralysis cases has failed to confirm any other polio cases, and an independent commission has certified the Region polio-free, based on national surveillance data from all the countries.

families are fully aware of the importance of vaccines—"one of modern science's most cost-effective and important health interventions"—Dr. Alleyne said that this World Health Day provided an opportunity to "drive home the message that we must continue to educate the public and raise awareness about the benefits of immunizing our children."

Following Dr. Alleyne's address, the Acting Commissioner of the Washington, D.C. Commission of Public Health, Dr. Marlene Kelley, read the proclamation of World Health Day in the District of Columbia, signed by Mayor Marion Barry.

The next speaker was Dr. Jo Ivey Boufford, Principal Deputy Assistant Secretary for Health, U.S. Department of Health and Human Services. Dr. Boufford spoke of the importance of recognizing the community as the fundamental unit from which any health initiative is carried forward. She emphasized that the United States, through the U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID) and the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), would continue to work with PAHO on immunization, as it had during the polio eradication campaign, and she read a message from U.S. President Bill Clinton praising the accomplishment of polio eradication in the Western Hemisphere and urging citizens of the United States to observe World Health Day.

## Awards

Dr. Peter G. Bourne, Chairman of the Board of AAWH, presented the 1995 World Health Day Awards, two for international achievement and four for work within the United States. The recipients illustrate the variety of initiatives that helped to defeat polio and that will continue to improve immunization levels against other diseases.

The Macedo Award, named in honor of Dr. Carlyle Guerra de Macedo, Director Emeritus of PAHO, was given to Mr. Gustavo Gross, President of PolioPlus-Peru, a program of Rotary International. The award recognized his dedicated work in organizing the polio eradication effort in his country, which in turn helped mobilize activities in other countries.

The Alleyne Award, named in honor of PAHO's current Director, was given to the National Vaccination Council (CONAVA) of Mexico for its contribution to the eradication of polio in that country. Since it was established in 1989, CONAVA has coordinated the immunization activities of the health sector, and its techniques have been emulated in 24 other countries.

The first of the domestic awards went to the All Kids Count Program, which was initiated and is partially funded by the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation and which operates out of the Carter Center in Atlanta, Georgia. The Program coordinates a variety of projects designed to increase vaccination coverage and seeks to develop coalitions focused on child health and survival.

The Group Health Association of America (GHAA), the largest trade association for health maintenance organizations (HMOs), was the recipient of the second award. GHAA was recognized for establishing a Childhood Immunization Program, which recruited 325 HMOs to offer low-cost immunizations in order to boost coverage rates.

The third award went to Every Child by Two, a network of influential public figures founded by former First Lady Rosalynn Carter and Betty Bumpers, wife of former Arkansas governor and U.S. senator Dale Bumpers. This organization focuses on developing innovative immunization programs, including the use of computerized registries, and on providing parental education.

The final domestic award was presented to Dr. Walter A. Orenstein, Director of the National Immunization Program of the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, under whose leadership CDC has made available unprecedented resources for immunization.

## Panel Discussion

Under the theme "Using Past Successes," six expert panelists were asked to give their insights on the lessons learned in past and ongoing immunization campaigns that could be used to further improve immunization status. Dr. Bourne served as the moderator.

Mrs. Betty Bumpers, cofounder of Every Child by Two, spoke of her initial involvement in immunization programs while her husband was governor of Arkansas in the early 1970s. She emphasized that the initiative made use of existing agencies rather than creating any new administrative structures, which was why it became a model program for other states. In her opinion, the most significant boon to vaccination coverage was legislation requiring immunization for school entry. Every Child by Two seeks to extend full vaccination among young preschoolers.

Ms. Karen Ignagni, President and CEO of GHAA, stated that she believed the two most important accomplishments of her organization's immunization initiatives were (1) the development of a system within the affiliated health services for measuring progress and (2) the establishment of a community of individuals who shared their ideas and accomplishments—a network of people communicating about strategies. Furthermore, collaboration with CDC had spawned linkages with public health departments, allowing additional sharing of expertise.

Ms. Geraldine Marullo, Executive Director of the American Nurses Associa-

tion (ANA), saw the biggest challenge to be reducing barriers to vaccination access. ANA, in collaboration with other organizations, has sought to reduce these barriers by operating mobile immunization units in rural areas and offering vaccinations outside of traditional settings, for example, at carnivals. Noting that in some states only physicians are allowed to give vaccinations, she pointed out that outreach by public health nurses had proved successful in boosting vaccination coverage of children in places in the United States where doctors are in short supply, as well as in other countries.

Dr. Walter A. Orenstein outlined four points he considered vital as Director of the National Immunization Program at CDC: (1) the importance of a good disease surveillance system, which is the only way to be sure that the target diseases are being stopped; (2) the need for public/private collaboration at the national, state, and, especially, local level; (3) the need for innovative approaches to permit access to the preschool population, so that each child can be reached by age two with the 11 vaccine doses currently recommended; and (4) the importance of supporting disease prevention programs overseas, not only for humanitarian reasons but also for the protection of children in the United States from imported cases of disease.

The next speaker was Ms. Karen L. Ray, Project Director of the National Health Program of the Congress of National Black Churches, an umbrella group for eight historically black denominations representing 19 million people nationwide. Her organization has entered into a cooperative agreement with CDC to initiate a preschool immunization project promoted by the churches. She outlined her view of the process involved in achieving any social goal: someone has a vision; the vision is communicated to others; political will and social resolve are developed; boundaries—of race, class,

language, etc.—are crossed; partnerships are built; and, with perseverance and tenacity, success is achieved.

Mr. Jim Weill, General Counsel, Children's Defense Fund, asserted that the greatest advances come from the marriage of technical innovation and social mobilization—an art that he said the United States should relearn from developing countries and its own past. He believed cost still constituted a barrier to vaccination and emphasized the need for better insurance coverage. He affirmed the importance of bringing children for immunization in traditional care settings, so that they can also receive comprehensive medical care.

On the topic of traditional versus non-traditional vaccination settings and providers, Dr. Bourne asked the panel to address the question of whether vaccination in the United States was overregulated. Mrs. Bumpers supported the idea of providing vaccination separately from comprehensive health care. Ms. Marullo believed that the current movement to restructure the health system offered an opportunity to change the idea that care must always be provided in a traditional setting. However, Mr. Weill pointed out that some children would still be missed even if vaccination were taken to other settings, such as day-care centers. Dr. Orenstein stated that while outreach was an important strategy at present, the ultimate goal of providing comprehensive care must be kept in mind. Ms. Ignagni acknowledged the practicality of using nurses and other health workers as vaccination providers, but agreed that immunization should be viewed as a point of entry for a child into the health system so that he or she can receive other needed care.

## Keynote Address

The First Lady of the United States, Hillary Rodham Clinton, delivered the

keynote address. She announced that the United States of America would join in support of the measles elimination initiative and other hemispheric health care priorities by providing a five-year, US\$ 20 million grant to PAHO through USAID. The full text of the keynote address appears below.

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### *Remarks by Hillary Rodham Clinton on the Occasion of World Health Day 1995*

Thank you very much, Dr. Alleyne, and all of you who are gathered here today. I know you've already had an excellent program. I know some of the speakers who have already addressed you and the work they have done over decades on behalf of children and, in particular, on behalf of immunization.

I am pleased to be here with all of you on World Health Day. This marks a historic opportunity for all nations to come together to work to improve the health of our global family. I also want to thank all of you here at PAHO who are on the front lines every day promoting better health throughout our hemisphere. I agree completely with Dr. Alleyne that you are the real champions of children, and it is your work every single day—your persistence, in many instances your begging, your challenging, your promoting the idea that every child, every person is entitled to health care—that really makes what we are now celebrating, with the eradication of polio in this hemisphere, a reality.

Nothing is more important to our shared future than the well-being of children, and for that reason I am especially pleased that children are the focus of this year's World Health Day. As you may know, I just returned yesterday from a 10-day trip to South Asia, where I saw firsthand some of the world's greatest health challenges and also some of the most innovative, thoughtful methods of bringing better health care to children and women in poor and remote areas. For me, that trip was an inspiring reminder of how much progress can be made when the will and commitment are there to help those in need.

Today's world is one of great promise for the 130 million children of our own hemisphere: great promise because our children are obviously our lifeline to prosperity and progress in the exciting and unpredictable century that lies ahead; great promise because there are millions of healthy children across the Americas whose futures are filled with hope; and great promise because of historic commitments born at the Summit of the Americas last December [in Miami], commitments that will translate into greater opportunity and justice for all children. Among other initiatives, government leaders endorsed the goal of making basic health services available to all citizens. That will be extremely beneficial to children, who are the most vulnerable to illnesses and unhealthy living conditions.

I also want to commend the First Ladies who participated in the symposium on children in Miami and worked with Dr. Alleyne to clarify our common vision and goals. Today these women across the Americas are turning rhetoric into reality by helping launch PAHO's historic campaign to eliminate measles from our hemisphere by the year 2000. Later this year, many of these women will convene in Paraguay to review [their] efforts and share [their] experiences in working to meet this goal.

The campaign to eliminate measles is vital to all of our futures. It will save the lives of countless children in every country and will bring primary health care to every single village in our hemisphere. I can say this with confidence, because we know from past experience that it can be done.

The Pan American Health Organization already has led the world in getting rid of the polio virus. Since the World Health Organization resolved to [eradicate] polio in 1988, the number of polio cases around the world has declined by 82%. Today, 145 countries are polio-free, and last year, as we already heard, the Americas became the first region in the world to be declared formally free of polio, and not a single case has been detected in the Region since August of 1991.

All of you here should take great pride in that achievement. You succeeded in getting many nations and private and public institutions involved, and that is no small achievement. Now the work must continue in other

parts of the world, and in our Region we must turn our attention to another major health threat to children: measles.

My husband often talks about children as the greatest resource of every nation, and one of the best ways to build on that resource is to invest in children, especially their health. And I would add to and echo Dr. Alleyne's comments: When we talk about health and education for children, we're not talking about a "soft" issue, about a marginal issue. We are not talking about an issue that is the province of women. We are talking about a core issue that will determine the future of every one of our nations; and this is an urgent mission—that we understand fully how significant the health of our children is to the future of all of us.

Because, just as we live in a time of great promise for children, we also live in a time of great peril. More than half of the population in this hemisphere is under the age of 23, and too many of our young people in every one of our countries suffer from poverty, hunger, illiteracy, and inadequate health care.

But the statistics need not be so grim. While ushering children into the world is the province of families, protecting them from avoidable diseases must be viewed as the shared responsibility of our larger human family. We all know that a sick child has much less chance of learning, growing, and fulfilling his or her potential than a child who is healthy. A sick child has much less reason to be hopeful and optimistic about the future, is less likely to develop into a healthy, productive citizen. That is why it is our responsibility as a community of nations to insist that all children receive the health care they need.

We have the technology. Vaccinations exist for most of the major childhood diseases, and they are far cheaper than long-term treatments for the disabilities that result when children become seriously ill. All we need now is the commitment to make these immunization campaigns succeed.

The United States has been a proud partner of past efforts to eliminate major childhood diseases in this hemisphere. Nearly half of all external donor funding for the polio campaign came from the United States Agency for International Development. The United States

currently is providing nearly US\$ 7 million as part of our child survival programs in the countries of the Americas.

Today I am pleased to announce that the United States will join in partnership with PAHO in the campaign to eliminate measles across the hemisphere. PAHO has estimated that an additional US\$ 46 million is needed for immunization programs between now and the end of the century. Through USAID, the United States plans to extend a five-year, US\$ 20 million grant to PAHO to advance hemispheric health care priorities. Although the United States, like many other nations, is operating under budget constraints, our government hopes to allocate US\$ 8 million directly to the regional Expanded Program on Immunization, which includes support to the measles campaign. At the same time, we have every expectation that, just as with the polio effort, USAID programs and technical support across the Americas will help boost the campaign to eliminate measles. During the polio campaign, those programs more than doubled our regional commitment.

One of the most important aspects of PAHO's campaign to eliminate measles is that it will advance all of our immunization efforts. Perhaps equally important, it does reflect a larger vision of health reform that extends a basic package of integrated health services throughout the Region and, in that way, carries forward the Summit of the Americas Plan of Action. It also provides us, through this measles campaign, continuing opportunities for surveillance throughout the Region, so that we do remain very much focused on how effective we are in delivering immunization services. We have succeeded with respect to polio, but we must remain vigilant as to that disease and all others.

Although our specific health challenges may differ from country to country, and our recipes for progress may require different ingre-

dients, we share a common future and a common cause. We must not work in isolation to solve our problems, whether we are health organizations, NGOs, government leaders, [or] private citizens. We must join together as partners who appreciate the value of sharing our knowledge and experience.

And we must remember that when it comes to helping our children, words alone are not enough; policy papers are not enough; press releases are not enough; documents and studies are not enough—we have had more than our share of each. Instead, we must translate into action what we can do and then get on with the business of doing it.

Ultimately, we must be guided by a desire in our hearts to see that all children have the gift of hope in their lives. As the wonderful Chilean poet Gabriela Mistral once wrote: "Many things we need can wait; the child cannot." And so today, as we celebrate this very important effort, I hope each of us will remember that the child cannot wait, and we can do something to ensure that the child throughout this hemisphere has the opportunity to live up to his or her God-given potential.

Thank you very much.

*7 April 1995*

*Washington, D.C.*

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Following her remarks, the First Lady was presented with a special World Health Day Award from AAWH in recognition of her many years of dedicated concern for the health and welfare of children.

The ceremony closed with a performance of "We Are the World" by a children's choir from the Washington International School.

