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*Director's Letter*

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**THE CHALLENGES FOR 1994**

This year, PAHO aims to tackle certain challenges that require priority attention from both the Secretariat and the Organization as a whole. The first and most important is to obtain the broadest possible support for health as an important component of the new development model in the Latin American and Caribbean countries, so that the health sector becomes a protagonist in achieving it. As part of this challenge the role of the State in relation to health and the collaboration between public and private agencies in the financing and delivery of health services must be better defined. The central goal of all these efforts is equity.

Another task involves continuing to support the transformation of health systems. This process must not be delayed or weakened; on the contrary, it must gain strength and momentum. Local health systems are the key to effective decentralization, which must be accompanied by efforts to improve quality of care and to develop managerial capacity at the local as well as the national level.

Health promotion constitutes the third great challenge. Activities aimed at informing the public about health, inculcating healthy behaviors, creating healthy community environments, and promoting public policies conducive to everyone's health and well-being must be broadened. Violence prevention must become a part of public health. Health promotion strategies, together with local health systems, will create the means and opportunity for communities, families, and individuals to help protect their own health.

We will also continue the struggle against communicable diseases and malnutrition. Building upon our successes, we will work toward eradication, elimination, or control of preventable illnesses, redouble efforts to improve the quality and availability of critical inputs, such as vaccines and food, and consolidate ongoing environmental initiatives.

The tools for meeting these challenges are investment in health, public information, cooperation among countries, development of human resources, and dissemination of scientific and technical information. We will strive to improve the quality of health information, our capacity to analyze it, the efficiency of research activities. In addition, some specific problems must be dealt with more fully. These include the situation of indigenous peoples, maternal and child health care, humanitarian assistance, prevention and mitigation of the effects of disasters, reproductive health and population activities, and the role of women in health and development.

The Secretariat will seek new ways to improve administrative support activities, work conditions, and planning, monitoring, and evaluation procedures. Our toil and commitment will be reflected both in the strategic orientations and program priorities for the period 1995-1998 and in the strengthening of our relationship with the Member Governments and of their participation in the Organization.



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