



*executive committee of
the directing council*

PAN AMERICAN
HEALTH
ORGANIZATION

*working party of
the regional committee*

WORLD
HEALTH
ORGANIZATION



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COUNTRY REPORTS ON HEALTH CONDITIONS

The XVIII Pan American Sanitary Conference, in Resolution XIII, decided to "invite the Executive Committee to study, in collaboration with the technical staff of the Pan American Sanitary Bureau and in consultation with the Governments, ways and means of facilitating the formulation, presentation, and discussion of the reports of the Governments so that the other Members of the Organization may derive the greatest possible benefit from the experience of each country."

Since 1947, when the Constitution of the Pan American Health Organization came into force, the reports on health conditions which the Governments submit every four years to the Pan American Sanitary Conference have given rise to problems which have not yet been satisfactorily and finally solved. On the one hand, it is essential for the Governments to have an opportunity periodically to explain the policy followed, the measures adopted, and the results achieved in the health sector in their countries, and, on the other hand, it is difficult to achieve that purpose during the Pan American Sanitary Conferences, the duration of which does not as a rule exceed two weeks. The procedure sometimes adopted of reserving plenary sessions for the statements of the Ministers or Delegates, while simultaneously holding one or more committee meetings, has two serious shortcomings: first, Governments that only have one Delegate can be represented at only one of those meetings, and, secondly, Ministers and Heads of Delegations are unable to attend the plenary sessions when matters of particular interest to them are being discussed in committee. The result is that the main advantage to be obtained from the oral statements on health conditions, namely, a direct exchange of experience and a discussion of policies between Governments, is not achieved.

Statements of the Governments and Technical Discussions

At this juncture, it is advisable to consider the question from the constitutional standpoint. According to the Constitution in force, there

is no obligation on the Governments of the Americas to submit reports on health conditions in their countries to the Conference. There is only a precept, which has been invoked on some occasions, and Article 4-C of the Constitution, which stipulates: "The Conference shall serve as a forum for the interchange of information and ideas relating to the prevention of disease, the preservation, promotion, and restoration of mental and physical health, and the advancement of sociomedical measures and facilities for the prevention and treatment of physical and mental diseases in the Western Hemisphere." However, nothing is said about how the Conference is to serve as a forum. Rule 1 of the Rules for Technical Discussions, to the effect that "the Pan American Sanitary Conference . . . and the Directing Council of the Pan American Health Organization . . . shall meet in special session to hold technical discussions to deal with matters of regional interest relating to the activities of the Pan American Health Organization, or of the national public health administrations, the study of which may produce immediate and practical results," would appear to indicate that the Technical Discussions serve as the forum to which reference is made in the Constitution.

It therefore follows that the Technical Discussions and the statements on progress achieved in public health matters submitted to the Pan American Sanitary Conference are two separate activities. Furthermore, the Technical Discussions are held annually, whereas the above-mentioned statements are submitted every four years. However, as will be seen below, on certain occasions the two activities have been merged so that the Technical Discussions derived directly from the statements of the Governments, as occurred at the XIV Pan American Sanitary Conference.

The history of this question, which is summarized below, illustrates the complexity of the problem and the practical difficulties that have arisen.

Background

The statements of the Governments on the progress achieved in public health matters in the period between Conferences had its origin in the V International American Conference (Santiago, Chile, April 1923), that is to say, almost 25 years before the Constitution of the Organization came into force.

It was stipulated that at the Conferences of American States a committee on hygiene would be established and a general report "presented to the Conference upon progress made in the various countries since the preceding Conference, together with such recommendations as may be deemed desirable." It should be borne in mind that the Conferences in question were essentially political meetings designed to map out policy in all sectors of inter-American activity. In addition, the V Conference decided that Pan American Conferences of National Directors of Health should be held in the intervals between Pan American Sanitary Conferences.

The Constitution of the World Health Organization, which was ratified in 1948, states in Chapter XIV that each Member shall report annually to the Organization on the action taken and the progress achieved in improving the health of its people, as well as on the action taken with respect to recommendations made to it by the Organization and with respect to conventions, agreements, and regulations.

For its part, the Directing Council of the Pan American Health Organization at its III Meeting, which was held in Lima, Peru in October 1949, advised Member States "to present a written report, preferably statistical, to each Pan American Sanitary Conference on the work accomplished between Conferences" (Resolution XV).

Accordingly, the agendas of subsequent Pan American Sanitary Conferences, from the XIII held in 1950 in Santo Domingo, Dominican Republic, to the XVIII held last year in Washington, D.C., have included an item "Country Reports of Member Governments on Health Conditions and Progress Achieved in the Period Between Pan American Sanitary Conferences."

The statements made by the countries to the Conferences have been dealt with in from three to five complete plenary sessions, although the XV Pan American Sanitary Conference, held in 1958 in Puerto Rico, limited statements to not more than ten minutes.

At the XIV Pan American Sanitary Conference, held in Santiago, Chile in 1954, those statements constituted the Technical Discussions, but this practice was not followed in subsequent Conferences. The statistical information requested has been used for preparing the quadrennial report on "Health Conditions in the Americas."

The efforts made to limit the oral statements of delegates to aspects of general interest has not been successful. The ten minute time limit allowed for statements was never favorably accepted and in practice was never complied with. On the other hand, it must be recognized that ten minutes is not sufficient time for even a general account of the progress and results achieved in the health sector, as was seen at the XVIII Pan American Sanitary Conference, when the time allowed for the statements of Delegates was limited to ten minutes.

Possible Solutions

It should be borne in mind, that, at the present time, two reports containing the most important information on health in the Americas are published every four years. One is the World Health Situation, published by WHO, which contains a chapter on the countries of the Americas, and the other is Health Conditions in the Americas, prepared by PASB, which provides a statistical analysis of the main health and health-related problems.

The unnecessary duplication of these two publications and the statements to the Conference should be avoided, and these should be organized in such a way as to provide information conducive to more and better assistance by the Organization to the countries of the Americas in improving the health of their people.

In conclusion, a number of possible solutions are available:

1. To discontinue the statements of Delegates to the Pan American Sanitary Conferences on the progress and results achieved in the period between Conferences.
2. To continue the present procedure but limit the time allowed for the statements of Delegates to 15 minutes, in which case two-and-a-half plenary sessions would be needed.
3. To make a special study of one aspect of health administration at each Conference. The topic would be chosen by the Directing Council, and the Bureau would prepare a background document to be discussed during one plenary session only.
4. To have the Governments send to the Bureau a written report covering the period since the preceding Conference, dealing with administrative aspects of the health sector and the results obtained, thereby preventing duplication of the national statistical data which are submitted for publication in the volume dealing with health conditions in the Americas. These reports would be collected, edited, and published in the Scientific Publication series.

The sole purpose of this paper and of the suggestions it contains is to provide the Executive Committee with the necessary background information for complying with the instructions of the XVIII Pan American Sanitary Conference.

III MEETING OF THE DIRECTING COUNCIL

XV. PAN AMERICAN CONFERENCES OF NATIONAL DIRECTORS OF HEALTH

WHEREAS:

The Executive Committee of the Pan American Sanitary Organization has recommended that the Directing Council express its views on the realization of future Pan American Conferences of National Directors of Health; and

The present constitutional structure of the Pan American Sanitary Organization provides for a supreme organ of government, the Pan American Sanitary Conference, which is convened every four years and serves as a clearing-house for the exchange of information and ideas concerning the prevention of diseases and the preservation, promotion, and restitution of physical and mental health, and further provides for annual meetings of its Directing Council,

THE DIRECTING COUNCIL

RESOLVES:

1. To recommend to the XIII Pan American Sanitary Conference, to be held in 1950, that it express a conclusive opinion on the advisability of abolishing the periodical meetings of the National Directors of Health, in order to avoid useless duplication of effort on the part of the Member States; and
2. To advise the Member States to present, at each Pan American Sanitary Conference, a written report, preferably of statistical nature, on the work accomplished between Conferences.

(6-13 October 1949)

RESOLUTION XXIV

SUMMARY OF REPORTS OF THE MEMBER STATES FOR 1954-1957

THE XIV PAN AMERICAN SANITARY CONFERENCE,

CONSIDERING:

That the "Summary of Reports of the Member States 1950-1953," prepared by the Pan American Sanitary Bureau, is a valuable document for providing knowledge of the health problems of the Americas and for coordinating health programs, inasmuch as it contains statistical data on population, births, deaths, cases of communicable diseases, personnel and organization of health services, and description of programs; and

That it is evident that the data in these reports are not strictly comparable, because of differences in definitions and procedures followed by the various countries,

RESOLVES:

To recommend that the Member States:

- (a) Immediately begin the improvement of these statistical data, in accordance with the recommendations of international organizations; and
- (b) Agree to increase the statistical information that their reports to the next Pan American Sanitary Conference should contain, and decide upon the procedures for obtaining such information and the methods for ensuring international comparability, with the active cooperation of the Pan American Sanitary Bureau and through seminars and other activities for the exchange of ideas and procedures.

(7-22 October 1954)

RESOLUTION XXXVII

SUMMARY OF REPORTS ON HEALTH CONDITIONS IN MEMBER COUNTRIES

THE XV PAN AMERICAN SANITARY CONFERENCE,

Considering that the Summary of Four-Year Reports on Health Conditions in the Americas, prepared for this Conference, represents an obvious advance in providing data for the planning of national and international public health programs;

Considering that, for the preparation of a report of the same nature to be presented at the XVI Pan American Sanitary Conference, it will be very useful to have available, from all the countries, the most complete information possible, which would include the greatest number of data concerning vital and public health statistics; and

Considering that the Eleventh World Health Assembly, in Resolution WHA11.38 has invited the Member Governments to present reports on the period 1957-1960, in order to prepare its second report on the world health situation,

RESOLVES:

1. To recommend to the Member Countries that they take the necessary measures to have their reports on health conditions, which they will prepare for the XVI Pan American Sanitary Conference, include complete information in the various fields of statistics.
2. Likewise to recommend to the Member Countries that they improve the information presented, with a view to making it possible to determine what the problems are and to know what resources are available - factors essential for the most effective planning of national and international health programs.
3. To request the Pan American Sanitary Bureau to collaborate by providing technical services to aid the countries in obtaining the statistical information that they will have to prepare for the four-year report to be presented to the XVI Pan American Sanitary Conference and for the second report of the WHO on the world situation.

(Approved at the fifteenth plenary session,
3 October 1958)

RESOLUTION IX

SUMMARY OF FOUR-YEAR REPORTS ON HEALTH CONDITIONS IN THE AMERICAS

THE XVI PAN AMERICAN SANITARY CONFERENCE,

Considering that the Summaries of Four-Year Reports on Health Conditions in the Americas presented to the XIV, XV and XVI Pan American Sanitary Conferences provide an important record of progress in the Americas and contribute comparative data for the planning and evaluation of national and international programs; and

Considering that the planning of long-range programs requires basic data of many types, which should be as complete and comparable as possible and available for all areas of the Americas,

RESOLVES:

1. To recommend that the Governments of the Organization take the necessary steps to expand and strengthen their programs for the collection, publication, and utilization of vital and health statistics that will serve as a basis for the formulation, execution, and evaluation of national health programs.
2. To encourage the prompt, accurate, and complete reporting of data on morbidity and mortality due to communicable diseases, for immediate use in the planning, execution, and evaluation of programs for the control or eradication of such diseases.
3. To request the Director of the Pan American Sanitary Bureau to continue to stress the importance of the annual publication of statistics on morbidity and mortality due to notifiable diseases, so that current evaluation may be made of the progress of control or eradication programs on a local, national, and international basis.
4. To recommend that each national health authority establish, or strengthen, its statistics department so that it will function at the appropriate level, respond to the needs, and fulfill the responsibilities recommended in the Pan American Sanitary Code and by the XIV Pan American Sanitary Conference.
5. To encourage the Governments of the Organization to support education and training programs in statistics for professional, technical, and auxiliary personnel, so that rapid progress may be made in obtaining basic data and utilizing them effectively.

6. To recommend to the Director that the Organization continue to give high priority to the improvement of the quality and coverage of vital and health statistics, so that throughout the Americas adequate systems of collection and utilization may be developed during the next decade.

7. To recommend that the Bureau continue the publication of the Summaries of Four-Year Reports on Health Conditions in the Americas, and that increased efforts be made at all levels to improve the quality of the data submitted on human resources, health and hospital services, and other facilities.

(Approved at the ninth plenary session,
2 September 1962)

RESOLUTION XXXIX

REPORTS OF THE GOVERNMENTS OF THE ORGANIZATION
ON PUBLIC HEALTH CONDITIONS

THE XVII PAN AMERICAN SANITARY CONFERENCE,

Mindful that the reports of the Governments of the Organization on public health conditions and the progress achieved during the interval between two consecutive Conferences contain valuable data and results of experiences; and

Considering that it would be in the interest of the Governments to use the Conference as a forum for the exchange of information and ideas about important aspects of the health conditions in their respective countries,

RESOLVES:

1. To invite the Governments to transmit to the Pan American Sanitary Bureau, at least four months before the XVIII Pan American Sanitary Conference, their reports on public health conditions and progress achieved in this field for the years 1966-1969.
2. To request the Director of the Bureau to make a comparative study of the reports and select those aspects he considers to be of the foremost importance for health in the Americas.
3. To instruct the Director to inform the Governments of the selection he has made and to invite them to make special reference to them when they make their oral presentations at the XVIII Pan American Sanitary Conference.

(Approved at the thirteenth plenary session,
7 October 1966)

RESOLUTION XI

REPORTS OF THE GOVERNMENTS OF THE
ORGANIZATION ON HEALTH CONDITIONS

THE XVIII PAN AMERICAN SANITARY CONFERENCE,

Having considered the reports of the Governments of the Organization on health conditions and the progress achieved during the interval between the XVII and XVIII Pan American Sanitary Conferences, presented in accordance with Resolution XV adopted at the III Meeting of the Directing Council; and

Mindful that these reports contain extremely valuable data on important aspects of the health conditions in the countries concerned and reflect the results of diversified experience,

RESOLVES:

To thank the Governments for their reports on the health progress achieved during the period 1966-1970.

(Approved at the eighth plenary session,
6 October 1970)

RESOLUTION XIII

COUNTRY REPORTS ON HEALTH CONDITIONS

THE XVIII PAN AMERICAN SANITARY CONFERENCE,

Convinced that the reports of the Governments of the Organization on health conditions and progress achieved in the intervals between one Conference and the next constitute useful records of experience; and

Considering that the reports of the Governments should be one of the most important items on the agenda of the Conference,

RESOLVES:

To request the Executive Committee to study, in collaboration with the technical staff of the Pan American Sanitary Bureau and in consultation with the Governments, ways and means of facilitating the formulation, presentation, and discussion of the reports of Governments so that the other Members of the Organization may derive the greatest possible benefit from the experience of each country.

(Approved at the tenth plenary session,
8 October 1970)