

# Development of Epidemiology in Central America

*The VIII Meeting of the Health Sector of Central America (RESSCA), held in San Salvador on 2-5 September 1992, was attended by representatives from Belize, Costa Rica, El Salvador, Guatemala, Honduras, Nicaragua and Panama. Fourteen key resolutions were adopted on aspects related to health, among which is of special interest the Resolution on the Development of Epidemiology.*

## CONSIDERING:

1. Article 42 of the Declaration of Presidents signed at Managua and the resolutions of the meetings of the Ministers of Health (COMISCA), which call for coordinated action in the area of epidemiological surveillance;
2. The need for a joint effort by all the countries geared to gaining a better understanding in each case of the determining factors, the resources available, and the actions required in order to bring epidemics under control in the sub region;
3. The social, political, and economic consequences of the current cholera epidemic for the countries of the sub region,

## RESOLVES:

1. To approve the proposal presented by the national directors of epidemiology and officials responsible for cholera prevention and control programs at the Central American meeting for the implementation of a sub regional program to *support the development of epidemiology* in the countries of the area through the strengthening of epidemiological surveillance systems.
2. To designate a delegate from each country to serve on a Central American working group which, with the necessary support from PAHO/WHO, should be convened at the earliest possible date to develop the details of the program.

3. To report the Central American presidents at the next presidential summit, scheduled for December 1992, on the decision taken at the VIII RESSCA as well as the next steps to be taken toward implementation of this program.

The proposal approved at the VIII Meeting of the Health Sector of Central America was prepared in Guatemala on 20-22 August with a view to strengthening the capacity of health services at all levels to identify the geographical/population sectors most affected by cholera, diarrhea in general, and other health problems and to take such actions as: (1) developing hypotheses to account for the appearance or spread of the phenomenon in question (for example, cholera), and (2) undertaking research to confirm these hypotheses.

This approach should make it possible to determine the local importance of certain risk factors by comparing groups exposed to a given factor with those not exposed to it, to establish whether or not the frequency of the health problem in the exposed group is *significantly* greater, and to estimate the proportion of damage that could be reduced in the population under study. In other cases, different designs might be more appropriate. This approach would be a valuable step toward ensuring that prevention and control measures within the health sector are adopted and carried out more rationally and that those corresponding to other sectors are negotiated by public health leaders on a solid foundation.

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## Epidemiological Activities in the Countries

### General Epidemiology Course in Paraguay

A course on general epidemiology was held in Asunción, Paraguay, from May to July 1992, under the coordination of the Ministry of Public Health and Social Welfare, and with technical cooperation of the "Dr. Juan H. Jara" National Institute of Epidemiology, Mar del

Plata, Argentina, and of the PAHO/WHO Country Office in Paraguay. The primary focus of the course was to insert the use of an epidemiological approach into the daily practice of health services personnel.

It had been recognized that the need to assist health services patients has required that personnel center their