



directing council

PAN AMERICAN HEALTH ORGANIZATION

XXII Meeting

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WORLD HEALTH ORGANIZATION

XXV Meeting



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FIRST NATIONAL HEALTH CONVENTION

(Presented by the Government of Mexico)

The health organization in Mexico and the programs which are being implemented are faced, as in other countries, with numerous and complex problems. The need to provide care for an expanding population has obliged the health institutions to develop into flexible organizations whose activities are oriented towards the delivery of services to ever larger groups, especially in the rural areas.

For directing and coordinating the activities aimed at improving health two legal and administrative patterns have been adopted: centralization and decentralization. Examples of the former are the Department of Health and Welfare and other Departments of State. The second category comprises the para-State sector composed of various decentralized organizations among which the IMSS and the ISSSTE are the most important. These institutions have developed dynamic activities aimed at raising health levels, and these have led to appreciable progress in reducing mortality, promoting a healthier environment and improving education of the public.

Nevertheless, certain phenomena observed in recent years, particularly population growth, scientific progress and the demand for services, constitute determining factors and incentives towards carrying out a review of the country's health problems, the plans in course of implementation, the results achieved and the resources available, with the object of setting new targets and planning new activities designed to raise the level of health of the Mexican population.

With this end in view, and reflecting the will to change which exists in the Federal Executive, the President of the Republic initiated the proposal to hold in 1973 a National Convention in which the various institutions and groups of the health sector and bodies outside the sector

would participate and whose basic purpose, as was indicated in the notice of convocation, would be the formulation of the new National Health Plan to be put into effect over the next few years, establishing the targets to be met for 1976 and the projections for 1980.

The reaction to this initiative taken by the President of the Republic was one of great interest, since the Convention would be an unprecedented event in which the health institutions and the State and municipal governments would have an outstanding role to play, alongside universities, medical associations, workers' organizations and private groups.

The holding of the Convention also represented a stimulating factor towards bringing about a change of attitude at all levels and the acceptance and final recognition of the fact that health promotion should be objective and should operate through concerted action, cooperative efforts and effective coordination among the responsible institutions, since the attainment of the assigned goals requires the joint participation of a number of sectors in providing information, making their experience available, and presenting suggestions for improving the programs and making the services operate more smoothly.

Coordinating the manifold activities required for the holding of a meeting of this kind was a formidable assignment, since its aim was not to consider isolated fields of activity but the problems of the nation as a whole, with due provision for the participation of the various institutions and groups, and to conduct a thorough analysis of the inter-relationships between the health sector and other sectors.

It was the responsibility of the Department of Health and Welfare, as the State body, to coordinate the preparatory work and the actual conduct of the Convention. For this purpose there was established, at the highest level of the organization, a Directing Council with the Secretary of Health and Welfare as its Chairman, and as Vice-Chairmen the heads of the IMSS and ISSSTE, which are the decentralized organizations possessing wide responsibilities, the former in the provision of health care for the laboring sector of the country, and the latter for State employees. Seats on this Council were also allotted to other Departments of State which carry out important functions in the health field, as well as to Representatives of other institutions which, to various degrees and in various ways, exercise similar responsibilities.

The composition of the Council also took account of the need to ensure wide participation in the organizing process and in all the measures requiring to be taken, and to establish the conditions for the existence of a suitable fabric to give effective force to the provisions. This Council laid down the organizational policies and established the

responsibilities of institutions and groups in the study of national problems, in the provision of resources and in the tasks to be performed during the Convention.

The objective being to carry out the necessary measures for the preparation of a National Health Plan based on an analysis of problems, needs and resources at the local, municipal and State levels, the Chairman of the Directing Council conducted a campaign of information and rapprochement with the highest political levels of the 32 Federal bodies in the country in order to secure definitive recognition for health as a function of Government and not merely a responsibility of specialists or concern of specific groups.

This undertaking is considered to be of great importance, since it is not enough for a health plan to contain guidelines concerning the activities to be developed. For results to be achieved, a sound health policy must be based on a knowledge of problems and requirements at the local level and on acceptance of responsibility by the States in the performance of the tasks laid down in the plan, apart from the fact that the participation of the States is indispensable for gearing the projects to the conditions and essential features of the National Development Plans.

However, to put into effect the decisions of the Directing Council called for an organization to take responsibility for the planning and implementation of a wide range of activities and undertake the coordination of the operations necessary for the holding of the Convention. These functions were assigned to an Organizing Committee composed of representatives of the various institutions in the health sector, research centers and workers' organizations, which was accorded ample support in the performance of the tasks entrusted to it and had the necessary resources placed at its disposal.

The channeling of information towards the Directing Council on the progress of the work and the passing down of the decisions of the Council were done through a liaison channel represented by a coordinator who was granted powers of decision for the solution of operational problems in certain areas.

The Organizing Committee as constituted was headed by a Secretary-General's office, with five Secretaries' offices whose functions comprised the general planning of the Convention, drafting the notice of convocation and the Rules of Procedure, selecting the health areas to be dealt with, and drawing up guides and instructions for the conduct of the work of investigating health problems at the local, municipal and State level, as well as guides for the preparation of the State plans. The planning and execution of the operations for the holding of the

Convention, the publicity aspects, the organization of an exhibition and the personnel administration aspects were also the responsibility of this Committee.

All the above aspects concerned the central level. As regards the participation of the States, it was considered that only a flexible organization with the participation of the institutions which make up the health sector at those levels, sufficiently well informed and coming under the authority of the Head of the Executive, could carry out the tasks needed for the preparation of the State health plan.

Accordingly, in each of the States there was established such an organization, whose activities resulted in intensive mobilization of the population for the purpose of investigating health problems, evaluating resources and propounding feasible solutions. Organizations with a similar structure worked towards the same ends at the municipal and local levels. The results have shown that such an organization is the most suitable one for awakening the population to its responsibilities in the health sphere, and the only valid procedure for utilizing the organized strength of the people not only for the investigation of problems, but for devising solutions that take account of local realities. Moreover, often the tasks of health promotion at the State and local levels are carried on largely by the central bodies, and while there is explicit recognition of the need to establish flow-lines of information and decision from the periphery to the center so as to make possible State or regional planning, in practice there arise snags which prevent objective programming produced by analysis of local conditions so that goals and activities can then be integrated from the periphery into a national plan, perhaps not so perfectly as would satisfy the aspirations of those from whom the demand comes, but at least with the possibility of its being implemented in practice.

It is in this that the value of municipal and State participation resides, for the time and the conditions seem to have come where any attempt at national planning can and must be based on the activities at the periphery, while still giving consideration to measures for strengthening those activities with the resources of the central level, whose business it is to determine policy objectives in the national sphere in the light of the country's interests.

The organization of preparatory studies for the items presented at the Convention was the responsibility of the institutions and groups invited to attend. In all of them there was intense activity: the available documentation was reviewed, surveys were conducted, and public information activities were organized to elicit contributions from the interested sectors.

The National Health Convention was held from 16 to 20 July 1973, with the participation of 3,500 persons from within and outside the health sector and from all over the country. Thirty-two State Health Plans were presented, 23 of them by the Heads of the State Executives in person and the rest by high level officials, in addition to national programs in certain areas.

Two hundred and ten papers were also presented dealing with the basic health problems of the country and proposals were put forward on strategies to be applied, goals to be attained, and methods for achieving effective administrative reform in the health sector.

The conclusions and proposals arrived at are considered to be of great value and constitute the basis for the preparation of the new National Health Plan, work on which is already in progress with the participation of the sectors which took part in the Convention.

Finally, I should like to report that the experience gained in the organization and holding of the Convention which is the subject of this statement has revived the nation's confidence concerning the possibilities for national planning within the framework of our medical care system, has demonstrated the existence of a clearer awareness of problems, and has brought out the desire and determination of institutions and population to pool their efforts in the common task, aware as they have become that Mexico must move forward and progress at the pace required for the satisfaction of the needs of its population.

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