



### 1992: Year of Workers' Health

Workers' health was named by the XXIII Pan American Sanitary Conference as one of the priority areas for the quadrennium 1991–1994. During the same conference, the Ministers of Health adopted Resolution XIV, designating 1992 as the "Year of Workers' Health" in the Region of the Americas.

One goal of this initiative is to direct greater attention to the health of workers. It is hoped that giving high visibility to the area of workers' health in 1992 will encourage commitment from leaders, promote the exchange of information between employers and workers regarding problems and the causes of work-related accidents and diseases, and foster the development of a preventive consciousness. These developments, in turn, should result in increased resources for occupational health programs and national plans of action that have been or are being developed, as well as contribute to widespread recognition of the social and economic importance of these programs and plans. The changes in attitude that are promoted will lead to continued progress even after the end of the initiative.

An Organizing Commission was formed to plan activities, help mobilize resources in the countries, and promote broad dissemination of information on the initia-

tive's programs and objectives. It included leaders from the labor, public health, and business communities as well as prestigious scientific and political figures, among them former presidents Dr. Belisario Betancur of Colombia and Miguel de la Madrid of Mexico. On 26 February of this year, at a meeting in Washington, D.C., which formally launched "1992: Year of Workers' Health," the members of the Commission signed a Declaration on Worker's Health.

Calling workers' health "a strategic element of the utmost importance to achieve a sustainable and equitable development, the consolidation of democracy based on greater social participation, and more effective insertion in the world arena," the Declaration asserts that it is urgent for all social sectors to assign high priority to national programs and international cooperation in workers' health, focusing on the following:

- humanization of the workplace;
- introduction of a preventive health culture in the workplace;
- promotion and support of information and education activities aimed at eliminating or controlling workplace risk factors and safeguarding health and well-being;
- promotion and support of research and training centers to provide the needed information and education;
- emphasis on health and employment

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Source: Pan American Health Organization, Workers' Health, Document CE109/24, Washington, D.C., 27 May 1992.

as human rights and on the establishment of national-level policies and plans to prevent threats to workers' health and to the environment;

- encouragement of active participation by community groups, unions, employers, and workers themselves in management of health programs and services for workers;
- political commitment to the further development of workers' health at the highest decision-making levels;
- increased solidarity both among the countries of the Americas and with those outside the hemisphere.

PAHO'S Governing Bodies are being called upon to endorse the content of the Declaration. The Executive Committee did so at its 109th Meeting, held from 22–25 June 1992, by recommending adoption of a resolution in support of the Declaration and the initiative's plan of action to the Directing Council, which will meet in late September.

The plan of action of the initiative, as approved by the Organizing Commission, is aimed at attaining two targets: the formulation or revision and approval of national plans for the development of workers' health in all the countries of the Region in the course of the year, and the establishment in at least 10 countries of intersectoral coordination and national committees on occupational health to implement the national plans.

The lines of action included in the national plans will strive to extend health care coverage to the most exposed, most vulnerable, and least served workers, in-

cluding children, women, indigenous peoples, the handicapped, and those in the informal sector, focusing on both preventive and curative measures. The plans will encompass specific policies, legislation, regulation and standardization, provision of information, use of mass communication, research and epidemiologic surveillance, training, institutional strengthening, and development of services and programs, among other components.

A set of guidelines has been prepared to aid in the preparation or revision of national plans. These guidelines stress the importance of multidisciplinary cooperation between the various institutions and health programs, with support and collaboration from the community, unions, trade associations, and especially employers and workers.

In support of this initiative, the Organization is providing increased advisory services to the countries. A PAHO Interprogrammatic Group on Workers' Health is identifying the activities that each program can carry out to support workers' health, as well as activities that require interprogram collaboration. PAHO has also prepared an evaluation document to help the countries measure progress in this area. The Organization hopes that the proposed efforts and activities will make it possible for the countries to achieve better levels of health and well-being in the working population, extend the average length of economically active life, decrease absenteeism, reduce human suffering and disability, and increase production and economic and social development.

