
Director's Letter



LIVING WITH AIDS

To date, more than 200,000 people in the Americas have been diagnosed as having AIDS and over 100,000 are known to have died from this disease, while as many as 2.5 million people may unknowingly be infected with the human immunodeficiency virus. As these numbers show, AIDS is entrenched in the Region; we must learn to live with this painful reality. But living with AIDS does not mean adopting an attitude of acceptance or resignation. It means instead being prepared to fight the epidemic with all the tools at our disposal: to educate our citizens about AIDS and how to avoid HIV infection, to continue the research that has proven so fruitful thus far, and to pursue interventions that serve to diminish risk.

In the first decade of this epidemic, we have learned much. We have gained insight into the workings of the virus, its clinical effects, and the epidemiology of AIDS. We know this disease's impact not only on health but on the health care system and society, and have recognized the need for an intersectoral campaign to combat it. We have improved the methods of diagnosis and surveillance, made progress in establishing control measures, and developed treatments that prolong the period of health of those infected. However, there is still no effective long-term treatment, and there is no vaccine.

We are confident that soon, though not soon enough, these challenges will be met. In the meantime, we must keep living with AIDS—and keep fighting. Our fight is against not only the disease but also fear and the marginalization of AIDS sufferers and HIV-infected persons. Health workers must always remember that an AIDS victim isn't just a "case"; he or she is a human being of flesh and blood who deserves to be treated with compassion.

The multitude of public health problems, of which AIDS is only one, surpasses the resources of the health sector. In order to make the best possible use of the resources we have, it is vital that the latest scientific and technical information be broadly disseminated. For this purpose, PAHO organized the III Pan American Teleconference on AIDS, which was broadcast live from Caracas, Venezuela, to at least 100,000 viewers at 1,000 locations in the Americas from 13 to 15 March. All types of people who are involved in the fight against AIDS—administrators, educators, researchers, health workers, counsellors, and persons suffering from this disease or infected with HIV—were able to participate in a forum whose theme was "Living with AIDS" and whose message was that solidarity among committed and informed individuals will enable us to succeed in our common battle.



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