
Director's Letter



THE AIDS EPIDEMIC

Faced with the growing threat of acquired immunodeficiency syndrome (AIDS), communities and institutions throughout the world are responding gradually, but firmly and concertedly. In just seven years, gains in scientific research have surpassed every expectation, with the exploration of new frontiers in knowledge of the structure and pathologic mechanisms of the human immunodeficiency virus (HIV), the infectious agent of the disease. These gains, in turn, have made it possible to develop new, reliable diagnostic tests and to entertain the first hopes of finding an effective treatment for HIV infection. Like science, society is working to meet the challenge posed by the alarming vulnerability of some of its members to this disease: daily there emerge new community organizations—governmental and nongovernmental, public and private—that offer support, comfort, advice, and information to people afflicted with HIV infection or AIDS, to those who are at risk of suffering them, and to the general population.

Given the serious situation stemming from this epidemic, the Pan American Health Organization has joined forces with those of the WHO Global Program on AIDS and is collaborating with all the governments of the Americas in planning and carrying out national and regional prevention and control activities. Notwithstanding, there continues to be a need for urgent action: the 101,000 cases of AIDS reported in the Americas by 2 March 1989 represent only a fraction of the actual number; moreover, they are the result of infections transmitted five to ten years ago and do not reflect the current spread of the virus. Consequently, as health workers and as members of society, our responsibility is enormous. It is time for us to act decisively, vigorously, and with commitment, and we should spare neither effort nor resources. Clearly, whatever we do—or fail to do—will inevitably affect the magnitude of the AIDS epidemic and its grave economic and social consequences in the approaching millenium.



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