



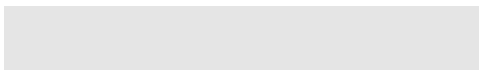
## XXXIV ACHR

Meeting of the Advisory Committee on Health Research  
of the Panamerican Health Organization  
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### PAHO'S TECHNICAL COOPERATION IN RESEARCH



Research Coordination  
Division of Health and Human Development  
Pan American Health Organization  
*Pan American Sanitary Bureau • Regional Office of the  
World Health Organization*  
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1999



This document was prepared by the Internal Advisory Committee on Health Research (IACHR) and by the Research Coordination Unit (HCR). Its goal was to carry out a diagnostic evaluation of the current state of research in the Pan American Sanitary Bureau at the different levels and to advise the Director on the current modalities of technical cooperation in this regard. To this end, they conducted a review of the documentation and recommendations of the ACHR concerning technical cooperation in research by the Divisions and Technical Programs, including evaluations of the technical cooperation carried out by Research Coordination and the Research Grants Program. The document review was complemented from April to June 1998 by a process of consultation and interviews with the Field Offices, Pan American Centers, and Division Directors, the results of which can be found in this document. The IACHR recommended submitting to the Director a Directive that would establish norms for this process and map out the functions and responsibilities of the different Technical Units at the Bureau. The Director brought the IACHR proposal before the members of his Cabinet and advised preparing a draft of the Directive and circulating it for feedback at all levels. This document, and the proposed Directive attached to it, are a compilation of the comments and recommendations of those who participated in the consultation process. Said Directive is hereby submitted for consideration by the Director's Advisory Committee on Health Research (ACHR) and is open to their suggestions and recommendations.

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## **Technical Research Cooperation by the Pan American Health Organization**

### **I. BACKGROUND**

With the object of advising the Director on managing technical cooperation in research, the IACR took the initiative of placing this topic on the agenda of its meetings, with the Director's consent, in order to make a proposal in this respect. To this end, HDR made the pertinent documents and recommendations of the Advisory Committee on Health Research (ACHR) available to the IACR at the meetings held from 1995 to 1997 on the Bureau's promotion and support of research.

The IACR concluded that it was necessary to bring itself up to date and better understand what was being done and how the support for research in the Bureau was being carried out at different levels. For this purpose, a consultation process was organized with the participation of the Divisions, the Pan American Centers, and the Representative Offices, using an open-ended questionnaire for the various levels as a guide. Table 1 presents a breakdown of the informants of the consultation by levels. The results of the consultation are provided in full in the Final Report (Annex I).

**TABLE 1**

<b>Countries</b>	<b>Responses</b>	
	<b>1<sup>st</sup> Round</b>	<b>2<sup>nd</sup> Round</b>
Argentina	yes	yes
Barbados	yes	no
Brazil	yes	yes
Chile	yes	no
Cuba	yes	yes
Dominican Republic	yes	yes
Honduras	yes	yes
Jamaica	yes	yes
Mexico	yes	no
Peru	yes	*
Venezuela	no	yes
<b>Centers</b>	<b>Single Round</b>	
CAREC	no	
CEPIS	yes	
CFNI	yes	
CLAP	yes	
INCAP	yes	
INPPAZ	yes	
PANAFTOSA	yes	

<b>Divisions</b>	<b>Informants</b>
HDP	Dr. Antonio José Casas, Director
HSP	Dr. Daniel López Acuña, Director
HPP	Dr. José Antonio Solís, Director
HEP	Mr. Horst Otterstetter, Director
HCP	Dr. Ana Lucía Andrade, HCP/HCT
SVI	Dr. José Luis Di Fabio, SVI

\* The questionnaire for the second round was not sent.

## **II. RESEARCH IN THE SECRETARIAT: GENERAL TRENDS**

The discussion on technical cooperation in research, based on a review of the documents, the work experience of the Research Coordination and the IACR, and the consultation conducted at the different levels of the Secretariat, yielded valuable information that made it possible to distinguish some current trends in the Bureau's technical cooperation in health research and suggest some conclusions. In some cases, these conclusions are supported by various evidence, while in others, they are observations that suggest hypotheses for discussion and even for research or a more in-depth study. The main comments and conclusions are organized below by level:

### **1. Regarding the Divisions and the Special Program**

- With regard to research agendas, the implicit or explicit agendas of the Regional Technical Programs are the most common. They are basically fundamentally on the need for up-to-date knowledge and information for the technical cooperation of these Programs. However, some efforts to set research priorities and formulate agendas for the Divisions as a whole were identified.
- The majority of research projects currently under way in collaboration with PAHO Regional Programs are financed with extra-budgetary resources or resources from WHO Special Programs. This makes it necessary to have agendas sufficiently explicit and coordinated to promote a process of inducement and negotiation of resources for research and thereby prevent the possible tendency for the agendas of the donors or agencies (public and private) that finance research to have significant weight in determining what is researched and with whom research is conducted in the countries of the Region.
- In general, there is a strong emphasis on evaluative and operations research, whose results constitute part of technical cooperation to provide an immediate response to concrete problems. The most strategic research, which is linked with the generation of knowledge and requires a sustained effort with time frames that are not as immediate, is not perceived to be a matter of concern for the Secretariat and thus for technical cooperation in research.

- All of this has implications for the very approach of technical cooperation in research, where special importance seems to be given to the “product” in terms of up-to-date information or knowledge generated about a concrete problem (the technical report), more than the strengthening of the capacity for research and collaboration among countries.
- The modality for the technical review of projects ranges from the technical opinion of Bureau staff members to consultations with experts or the establishment of independent peer-review committees. The latter is the least utilized. It was concluded that there is a need to orient the criteria governing the technical review of research projects to meet standards of relevance, importance, and scientific merit.
- Without certain standardized criteria and procedures for reviewing research projects, there is a tendency to not consider or take into account the necessary ethical review of projects involving human subjects. In general, projects supported by the Technical Programs and projects involving human subjects undergo a review by the Ethical Review Committee on Research (PAHOERC) when HDR or DLA identify the need for such a review.
- It was found that the Divisions have limited knowledge about the research projects supported by the Research Grants Program or the projects carried out by other programs in their own Division or other Divisions. It was concluded that there is a need to develop a streamlined useful information system that will facilitate the dissemination of and information on research projects carried out or supported by the Technical Programs and the Divisions.
- In general, the Divisions have not appointed Focal Points at the Division level to serve as a liaison with HDR on normative aspects and the information system.

## **2. Regarding the Pan American Centers**

- The Centers, except for INCAP, reported that they do not have a formal research agenda. The selection of topics and projects, in many cases, serves the interests of some researchers and, in others, the concrete needs of the technical cooperation for which they are responsible. In any case, it would seem that the Centers have autonomy with regard to research, and coordination with the Divisions and Technical Programs in this area was identified as either limited or nonexistent, except in the case of HPE/CEPECO.
- A large number of studies and research projects in which the Centers act as executing entities are linked to technical cooperation projects aimed at producing results that can be applied immediately. This trend suggests the hypothesis that the Centers are progressively reorienting their profile and mission toward serving more as specialized technical

cooperation agencies than as centers for research, experimentation, and evaluation.

- Much like the Divisions and Technical Programs, the research activities conducted by the Centers are highly dependent on extra-budgetary resources linked to technical cooperation projects and research grants for global projects (with WHO) or academic and research institutions in developed countries, primarily the United States. Some centers, such as INCAP and the CFNI, are subcontracted to conduct research in the countries of the Region whose principal investigators and financing sources are academic and research institutions in the developed countries, mainly the United States, Canada, and Europe.
- Close collaboration and working relations with academic and scientific institutions in the Region were reported. Some Centers have begun to form networks and partnerships with specialized institutions and centers in the countries to address common problems through joint efforts. An example of this that was reported is the consortium of specialized institutions and agencies for researching and evaluating programs for rabies control in the Americas. However, it was confirmed that the relations of the Pan American Centers with WHO Collaborating Centers are somewhat sporadic and limited to certain events or scientific activities.
- For financial reasons, the Centers have greatly reduced the activities aimed at strengthening national capacities for research and the training of investigators in their areas of expertise. However, some try to maintain refresher and training courses for internationally recognized specialists through fellowships granted by the PAHO Representative Offices in the countries or the national and international agencies that support research.
- Although different mechanisms were reported for the technical and ethical review of proposals, the Centers do not have institution mechanisms for project peer review. When the Centers are subcontracted to execute projects in the countries of the Region, they have already been subjected to a technical and sometimes ethical review by the committees of the academic and research institutions that administer the project grant. Some projects, because they involve the signing of agreements, have been reviewed by the PAHO Ethics Committee.

### **3. Regarding the Representative Offices**

- Cooperation to promote and support research is not listed as an explicit component with activities programmed and financed in the BPB. However, several Representative Offices indicated that they conduct research activities that are closely linked to technical cooperation projects or projects financed by banks and other donor agencies. In addition, it was confirmed that many of them are involved

in research projects that have been promoted by the Regional Technical Programs of PAHO or WHO Global Programs, with limited consultation or participation by the Representative Offices.

- Few Representative Offices reported having permanent working relations with the science and technology councils, the research bureaus of the ministries, or academic and research institutions.
- The Representative Offices do not have standardized mechanisms for conducting the technical and ethical review of projects where the Bureau is involved at the country level.
- All the Representative Offices reported having a Focal Point working on research to serve as a liaison with the Research Coordination, particularly, with respect to promoting the Research Grants Program and administrative matters related to that program. However, it would seem that every staff member/adviser in the Representative Office handles research aspects, when appropriate, in his/her area of expertise; however, the internal coordination role of the Focal Point of the Representative Office is not known.
- It was reported that there is limited knowledge and information about research projects that are carried out in the countries with the support of the Research Grants Program and even with the support of the Regional and Global Programs. A similar situation obtains with the agendas, documents, and recommendations made by the Advisory Committee on Health Research (ACHR). This fact confirms the need not only for an information system that includes the research projects in which the Bureau participates, but also the need to improve and develop streamlined mechanisms and instruments for the dissemination of information and documents on the subject.

### **III. TECHNICAL COOPERATION IN RESEARCH**

The responses to the consultation promoted by IACR/HDR, the discussions held in the meetings of the ACHR, and the experience gained by the IACR and HDR make it possible to highlight some strategic areas related to PAHO/WHO research cooperation activities. The observations presented below in the form of notes on these topics reflect the positions of the IACR and HDR. They are made with a view to promoting a discussion under the aegis of PAHO.

#### **1. Research Agenda**

Both the research activities conducted by the countries and PAHO/WHO technical cooperation in this field should be oriented by a defined agenda based on clearly established criteria. At the last meeting of the ACHR (June 1998), it was confirmed that the countries of the Region are increasingly aware of the need to draw up such agendas, and that the principal focus for their formulation should be the health needs and problems identified, using technical and participation criteria. In addition to supporting the preparation and implementation of national research agendas, PAHO/WHO should seek to establish regional research agendas, i.e. identify research



problems of regional importance and with a regional origin and impact, whose solution requires regional cooperation. The PAHO/WHO technical cooperation research agenda should include support for these national and regional research agendas, using the SPO and strategic elements, such as those mentioned below, for their preparation and implementation.

## **2. Research for Cooperation vs. Cooperation for Research: A False Dilemma**

In the consultation through interviews and questionnaires, a prevailing view was the importance of ensuring that the research promoted by PAHO is linked to and supports the activities or the priority topics/areas of PAHO technical cooperation rather than supporting research “per se.” In this way, PAHO cooperation activities would have a better foundation, and the resources allocated to research would be utilized more efficiently, since they would concentrate on priorities of interest to PAHO, not fragmented into an enormous number of topics and types of research. This apparent conflict and competition for resources between research for cooperation and cooperation for research is actually a false dilemma. There is a clear need (not always translated into the demands for cooperation) for the countries of the Region to set health research policies using a longer-term strategic approach in order to address a wide range of topics, areas, and disciplines that go beyond the cooperation needs of PAHO. PAHO, in turn, should support them in setting and implementing such policies.

In order to respond to both orientations and overcome this false dilemma, it is first necessary to identify and assign special importance to topics and types of research that meet both the demands for technical cooperation and the need to develop national scientific capabilities. Secondly, in cases where one of the orientations can be clearly identified (research for cooperation or cooperation for research), it is necessary to make spell out the objectives and cooperation instruments corresponding to each of them. Usually, PAHO directly executes or finances research projects whose main objective is to support its technical cooperation activities (research for cooperation), and it encourages and advises the countries to promote projects whose main objective is the development of scientific capability (cooperation for research).

## **3. Cooperation Agreements among Countries**

The existence of common problems, whose origin and effects are not limited to national arenas, creates the need to establish research cooperation agreements among countries that allow for the coordination of efforts to deal with these problems. The diversity and complementarity of capabilities among the countries of the Region and the existence of integration initiatives in various subregions promote a favorable environment for such agreements. PAHO/WHO meets all the conditions to act as a promoter and mediator for these cooperation agreements. Despite all these positive elements, however, problems are frequently mentioned that may stem from the unequal capabilities of the participants in some agreements. Significant among these problems is a type of discrimination between the roles of “countries that enter with problems and those that enter with solutions,” which in the end can accentuate inequities in capabilities, access to results, etc. PAHO mediation in these agreements should not only facilitate opportunities for consensus-building but define the criteria and

mechanisms suitable for preventing these distortions. The experience of the multicenter projects supported by the Grants Program is a good example of this, since through these projects PAHO promotes the generation of knowledge about problems of regional importance, while facilitating collaboration between research groups with different levels of development.

#### **4. Technical and Ethical Review**

Many of the Divisions, Pan American Centers, and Representative Offices have not established criteria and mechanisms for reviewing the projects in which they are involved. With the concern in most of the countries about developing research agendas to meet particular social demands, the review should consider not only scientific merit, but the relevance and importance of the projects, which may ultimately require different mechanisms. PAHO managers also do not seem to be fully aware that the review of the ethical aspects of any project in which the Organization is involved must be conducted by PAHOERC. These findings of the consultation point to the need for a Directive that clearly defines the objectives, criteria, and responsibilities of the various PAHO agencies regarding technical cooperation in health research.

#### **5. Promotion of Ties between Research and the Decision-making Process**

Bridging the gap between the generation and utilization of knowledge is one of the main challenges of scientific activity in the Region. We are increasingly aware of this problem, and studies on barriers to and facilitators of relations between producers and users are being conducted to provide a better foundation for the mechanisms for mediating between them. PAHO can play an important role in establishing these mechanisms, acting at the level of both policymakers, helping them make greater and better use of the available scientific information, and investigators, helping them to procure more effective dissemination of their results. Of the initiatives that favor the development of these activities, the Virtual Health Library currently being constructed under the leadership of BIREME could play a key role as a virtual intermediary between the producers and users of knowledge.

#### **6. Mobilization of Resources for Research**

The consultation based on questionnaires and interviews revealed concern about the mobilization of resources for conducting PAHO and country research activities. Usually, the resources in question are financial resources and the need for mobilizing them is recognized, bearing in mind a clear agenda of priorities. The establishment of an internal project review mechanism to be submitted by PAHO to external agencies (PRP) is an important advance that should be consolidated through the establishment of an agenda of priorities for mobilizing resources. In the case of research projects submitted to the PRP, technical and ethical review mechanisms should be more clearly established. The mobilization of human and institutional resources to support research activities in the countries should be an important component of PAHO technical cooperation activities in this field. The Collaborating Centers seem to be a mechanism with great potential in this regard, and better use should be made of them.

#### **7. Internal Coordination**

The interviews and responses to the questionnaires reflect weaknesses that still exist in the communication between policy-making, coordination, and review entities, such as the ACHR, IACR, PAHOERC, and HDP/HDR and the entities that execute the cooperation activities in substantive areas. Total clarity in determining the roles of these different entities also appears to be lacking, a matter that should be addressed by a Directive. The PAHO Research Information System (RIS) can be an important agent for integration and communication among these entities.

#### **IV. PROPOSED DIRECTIVE ON TECHNICAL COOPERATION IN RESEARCH**

### **PAN AMERICAN HEALTH ORGANIZATION**

September 1998

**DIRECTIVE No.:** HQ/FO-98-..

**DISTRIBUTION:**

**SUBJECT:** PAHO/WHO Technical Cooperation in Research

Bearing in mind that PAHO/WHO technical cooperation activities in research are a basic responsibility of all the technical agencies of the Organization, the object of this Directive is to define orientations for conducting such activities.

1. The objective of PAHO's technical cooperation activities in research is to:
  - Promote and support research that contributes to good practice in public health and to the solution of its most relevant problems.
  - Strengthen the scientific and technical infrastructure in the countries, with a view to increasing their capacity to respond to the needs of and demand for research.
  - Facilitate the development of collaboration networks among countries for the study of problems of regional scope.
  - Promote greater utilization of research findings in defining health policies and programs.
2. The technical cooperation activities to achieve these objectives are conducted by the various technical areas of PAHO at Headquarters, in the Representative Offices, and in the Pan American Centers in their respective areas of expertise. They include:
  - Technical consultation for the formulation and execution of policies for the development of health research at different levels: Regional, sub-regional, national and institutional.
  - Collaboration for the development of policies and training, continuing education and interchange programs for researchers.
  - Technical assistance for project development and implementation.
  - Financial support for research projects relevant to the public health of the Region.
  - Mobilization of financial, human and institutional resources for the formulation and development of collaborative research projects of regional, sub-regional or national interest.
  - Technical consultation to facilitate the publication, dissemination and utilization of research findings.

- Collaboration for the formation of research networks as well as intra- and inter-sectorial alliances.
3. Research projects in which PAHO/WHO, through its various entities, is directly or indirectly involved should meet the criteria of:
- Relevance with regard to the Strategic and Programmatic Orientations of the Organization.
  - Importance in regard to its contribution to health promotion and solving priority problems in public health.
  - Scientific merit.
  - Fulfillment of the ethical requirements for research involving human subjects.
  - Guaranteeing that the outcome ultimately obtained from this research is in the public domain.
4. Taking the foregoing into account, in terms of conducting research activities the various entities of the Organization have the responsibility to:

#### **Divisions (including the Pan American Centers) and the Special Program**

- Define the objectives, priorities, strategies, and activities that make up the respective research component and submit them every two years to the Advisory Committee on Health Research (ACHR) and the Internal Advisory Committee on Research (IACR).
- Establish mechanisms and coordination with their respective Pan American Centers for conducting research activities.
- Establish a mechanism for independent technical review of projects in which they are directly or indirectly involved and keep the Research Coordination (HDP/HDR) informed in this regard.
- Submit all research projects in which they participate directly or indirectly and that involve human subjects for review and approval by the PAHO/WHO Ethical Review Committee on Research (PAHOERC).
- Keep the PAHO/WHO Research Information System (RIS) up-to-date, in keeping with the guidelines to be established by HDP/HDR.
- Participate in the review and monitoring of the research proposals submitted to the Research Grants Program (RGP).
- Identify research institutions that are experts in their respective areas and participate in the process of designating them PAHO/WHO Collaborating Centers; program, participate in, and evaluate research activities carried out by those Centers.
- Designate a professional staff member as the Focal Point responsible for serving as a liaison with HDR and guarantee the maintenance of the Bureau's research information system.

#### **Representative Offices**

- Collaborate with the ministries of health, national boards of science and technology, and academic and research institutions in the formulation of concerted agendas in health research and in

promotion, training and continuing education programs for researchers.

- Promote the activities of the Grants Program in the country.
- Establish a mechanism for independent technical review of the projects in which they are directly or indirectly involved and keep the Research Coordination (HDP/HDR) informed in this regard.
- Submit all research projects in which they participate directly or indirectly and that involve human subjects for review and approval by the PAHO/WHO Ethical Review Committee on Research (PAHOERC).
- Keep the PAHO/WHO Research Information System (RIS) up-to-date, following the guidelines to be established by HDP/HDR.
- Identify expert institutions in research in the respective country for their ultimate designation as PAHO/WHO Collaborating Centers.
- Designate one of the advisors in the Representative Offices to act as a focal point with HDR for the delivery of technical cooperation and the maintenance of the Research Information System (RIS).

### **Research Coordination (HDP/HDR)**

- Coordinate the technical cooperation activities in research developed by the various PAHO/WHO agencies and guarantee compliance with criteria of technical and ethical review by all research projects in which the Office is directly or indirectly involved.
- Collaborate with boards of science and technology, ministries of health and scientific institutions in formulating concerted research agendas and mechanisms for its promotion and funding.
- Collaborate with academic and research centers linked to national boards of science and technology, to develop promotion, training, continuing education and exchange programs for health researchers.
- Provide consultation services on teaching research techniques and methodologies in postgraduate programs in areas related to public health.
- Conduct studies and analyze the status of health research in the Region.
- Cooperate technically in the promotion of public health research and to provide management and methodological consultation services in the development of research projects.
- Coordinate technically and administratively the PAHO Research Grants Program and guarantee the dissemination of the results of research funded by the Program.
- Develop and maintain the Research Information System (RIS) at the Pan American Sanitary Bureau (Headquarters).
- Administer the process of designating, monitoring, and evaluating PAHO/WHO Collaborating Centers and to maintain the Information System created for such purposes.
- Serve as the technical secretariat of the Advisory Committee on Health Research (ACHR), the Internal Advisory Committee on Research (IACR), and the Ethical Review Committee on Research (PAHOERC).

### **Advisory Committee on Health Research (ACHR)**

- Advise the Director of PAHO/WHO on setting the Organization's technical cooperation policies and research strategies.

### **Internal Advisory Committee on Research (IACR)**

- Advise the Director of PAHO/WHO on the management of the Research Grants Program and the review and selection of research proposals submitted to that program.
- Collaborate with HDP/HDR on coordinating PAHO/WHO research activities.

### **Ethical Review Committee on Research (PAHOERC)**

- Review the ethical aspects of all research involving human subjects in which PAHO/WHO is directly or indirectly involved and approve its execution.





