

# Bulletin of the Mental Health and Specialized Programs Unit



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Unit Team

Dr. José Luis Di Fabio, Interim  
Chief (Washington, D.C.)

[difabioj@paho.org](mailto:difabioj@paho.org)

Dr. Hugo Cohen, Subregional  
Adviser on Mental Health for  
South America (Argentina)

[cohenh@arg.ops-oms.org](mailto:cohenh@arg.ops-oms.org)

Dr. Maristela Monteiro  
Regional Adviser on Alcohol  
and Substance Abuse  
(Washington, D.C.)

[monteirm@paho.org](mailto:monteirm@paho.org)

Dr. Jorge Rodríguez,  
Subregional Adviser on Mental  
Health for Central America,  
Mexico, and the Latin  
Caribbean Countries  
(Panama)

[rodrigio@pan.ops-oms.org](mailto:rodrigio@pan.ops-oms.org)

Dr. Armando Vásquez,  
Regional Adviser on  
Rehabilitation (Santiago,  
Chile)

[vasqueza@chi.ops-oms.org](mailto:vasqueza@chi.ops-oms.org)

Mr. Javier Vásquez  
Human Rights Specialist,  
Legal Affairs Area/Technology  
and Health Services Delivery  
Area (Washington, D.C.)

[vasquezj@paho.org](mailto:vasquezj@paho.org)

Secretariat:

Mrs. Amalia Paredes

[paredama@paho.org](mailto:paredama@paho.org)

Mrs. Martha Koev

[koevmart@paho.org](mailto:koevmart@paho.org)

*The Mental Health and Specialized Programs Unit of the Pan American Health Organization (PAHO)/World Health Organization (WHO) are pleased to send you a new issue of the Bulletin. The object of this publication is to communicate important advances, news, and information on publications in the fields of mental health, the control of alcohol and substance abuse, rehabilitation, and the international protection of human rights in this context. The main objectives of this unit are to strengthen the countries' capacity to develop mental health policies, plans, programs, and services; formulate public policies for the control of alcohol abuse; prevent disabilities and achieve equal opportunities for people with disabilities; and promote and protect the human rights and fundamental liberties of people with disabilities and their families.*

## Alcohol: Action in the Americas

The impact of alcohol in the Region, as measured by the morbidity, mortality, and disability burden and the levels and patterns of alcohol consumption, are only part of the information needed by the regulatory agencies. Also important is support for the mobilization of all sectors of society involved in the study of the problems linked with alcohol, current policies, and what can be accomplished with the support of the public. To address this need, an initiative for communication in health has been launched: Red Salud (Health Network) (<http://www.comunit.com/la/redsaldud/>). Red Salud is a virtual network of nearly 700 journalists, and media and civil society organizations in 28 Latin American countries, which tackles issues related to alcohol from a public health standpoint. Its mission is to improve the coverage and handling of health issues in the media to foster social change in the Region. Its specific goals are to improve the coverage and handling of health issues in the Hemisphere's mass media; facilitate peer review of the quality of health reports; facilitate and promote the discussion of basic themes in health journalism; investigate, summarize, and disseminate the information that it is useful to inform and improve health journalism. Its website will contain information on alcohol, weekly and monthly bulletins and an interactive platform for members (but accessible to the public in read-only form). In addition, PAHO will finance and support Red Salud through an annual Journalism Award, with technical support from the Fundación Nuevo Periodismo Iberoamericano for the best articles on alcohol in the print or electronic media. Further information will soon be forthcoming. PAHO is also gathering data on national and community responses to alcohol-related problems, including information on successful experiences, the associations involved, the work of NGOs, and other issues aimed at reducing alcohol abuse and the harm it causes.

The sub-regional advisers are lending assistance in this effort, as are the focal points in the PAHO Offices in the countries. Any pertinent information can be sent to Dr. Monteiro ([monteirm@paho.org](mailto:monteirm@paho.org)) or Mrs. Dawson ([dawsonja@paho.org](mailto:dawsonja@paho.org)). This will help PAHO learn more about the needs, strengths, and weaknesses of alcohol policies in the Region.

## Mental Health Nurses

Over 10 years ago, PAHO launched an initiative, subsequently strengthened by the 2001 Regional

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Conference, to encourage the development of mental health nursing. Today the program consists of a regional cooperation network mobilized by nurses from more than 20 countries.

The group prepared the report *Contribuciones de las Enfermeras a la Salud Mental de las Américas* "Nurses' Contribution to Mental Health in the Americas". The report contains history, analysis, concepts, and orientations to support the development of community mental health policies and services, the improvement of quality practice, the enrichment of mental health education for nurses, the generation of information and evidence on human resources and the contributions of nursing to mental health, and the promotion of publications, networks, associations, and links. This initiative is coordinated by the Human Resources Development Unit of PAHO in Washington, D.C., with the participation of inter-country consultants, human resources, and services in mental health. Requests for the document and membership in the network may be directed to [malvares@paho.org](mailto:malvares@paho.org).

## Technical Guide: Organization of Social Networks for the Prevention of Depression

The burden of disease created by depression is substantial yet a large proportion of sufferers do not get any type of treatment (See *Pan American Journal of Public Health*, Oct.-Nov. 2005).

Since 2001, PAHO/WHO, with support from the Government of Spain, has been promoting a project in Panama called "Know depression and beat it." The results have been very encouraging; information on depression, its prevention, most common symptoms, and ways of accessing appropriate treatment has been widely disseminated.

As part of this effort, in 2002, the Government of the Province of Panama, working with 34 organizations (governmental, nongovernmental, and private), joined the project and created the Institutional Network for the Prevention of Depression in the Workplace.

This initiative has been both effective and sustainable. A team of professionals from the different disciplines has been formed to support

work in the centers involved in the project, whose basic purpose is to promote a healthy climate in the workplace and the identification and early treatment of people with symptoms of depression. Panama's Ministry of Health has actively supported and participated in the Network, providing technical assistance through its Mental Health Program and guaranteeing an appropriate response from the health services network.

As part of a Project for Technical Cooperation among Countries-TCC (Panama, Cuba, and the Dominican Republic) aimed at "strengthening the mental health component in primary care," Panama lent its experience organizing social networks for the prevention and control of depression in the workplace. The guide that was developed as part of this effort is a document that other countries may find useful.

The guide, prepared by Ms. L. Ulloa and Dr. G. Da Costa, was submitted to a peer review by professionals in the Ministry of Health and the National Institute for Mental Health of Panama and received technical assistance from PAHO/WHO.

The following institutions sponsored the guide:

- Ministry of Health of Panama
- Government of the Province of Panama
- Institutional Network for the Prevention of Depression in the Workplace
- Pan American Health Organization (PAHO/WHO).

## **Bibliography:**

- PAHO has available the brochure *What You Need to Know about Alcohol Policy*, which provides basic information on: alcohol policies, their executors, and effective and ineffective policies. It also discusses common misconceptions about harm reduction and alcohol abuse. This publication, in English, Spanish, and Portuguese, can be obtained through the PAHO Office or PAHO website.

Information about the WHO Mental Health Department (Geneva) can be accessed at: [www.who.int/mental\\_health/en/](http://www.who.int/mental_health/en/)