

Neglected Diseases in the Americas: Member States of PAHO commit to diagnose and treat neglected diseases at primary healthcare centers.

During the PAHO 49th Directing Council, MSF calls for governments to strengthen mechanisms of procurement for existing medicines so that access to treatment becomes a reality

Washington, 1st October – The 49th Pan American Health Organization (PAHO) Directing Council is being held in Washington DC this week. The international medical humanitarian organization Médecins Sans Frontières (MSF) welcomes the approved resolution for neglected diseases (CD49/9) entitled “Elimination of neglected diseases and other poverty-related infections”.

“It is clear that there are many diseases that have been silenced and ignored in the Americas, resulting in millions of people suffering and dying of a range of **preventable and treatable** infectious diseases, including Chagas disease. So it is a positive step forward that Member States have recognized the clear link between poverty and neglected diseases, and that given the current financial crisis, as well as the impact of the influenza A in the region, it is even more important to maintain neglected diseases as a priority.” said Gemma Ortiz Genovese, Senior Advocacy Officer for Neglected Diseases, MSF.

‘This is the 100th anniversary since the discovery of Chagas disease. It is endemic in 21 Latin American countries, with an estimated 10-15 million people infected and causing 14,000 deaths each year. Chagas programmes have traditionally focused on preventing the disease by controlling the "kissing bugs", as well as the screening of blood banks. However, prevention is not enough to conclude the so-called “unfinished agenda”.’ says Gemma Ortiz.

It is crucial that goals and indicators for the elimination and reduction for each disease reflect the financial and human resource commitments made by countries. In the case of Chagas disease, in order to translate the commitments into actions, countries should consider in its goals and primary strategies the integration of diagnosis of Chagas disease in the primary health care system, in order to provide treatment and care to all patients for both acute and chronic phases, as well as to reinforce supply chains of existing treatments within countries to scale up access. MSF calls for access to diagnostics and treatment to be made a priority if the region is to meet the very real needs of the people of the Americas.

Also recognized within the proposed resolution is the need for further Research and development (R&D) for new and improved diagnostic tools and treatment options. Countries agreed to explore a range of incentive schemes for R&D including addressing the de-linkage of the costs of R&D and the price of health products. MSF also calls for the research and development of technologies that meet Chagas patient’s needs, such as better treatments, diagnostics and test of cure.

The global challenge imposed by Chagas must also be considered, as more and more cases are being reported in the United States, Europe, Australia and Japan as a result of migration and mobility. In the specific Resolution addressing Chagas in the 63rd World Health Assembly (WHA), MSF hopes that the defined strategies and indicators committed by the PAHO member states are scaled up and reflected in the global response for Chagas disease.

Additional notes:

Since 1999, MSF has implemented Chagas projects in Honduras, Nicaragua, Guatemala, and Bolivia on diagnostic and treatment. Currently, MSF is working in three suburban districts in Cochabamba in Bolivia, the country with the highest recorded Chagas prevalence. MSF works with the Bolivian Ministry of Health in five primary healthcare centers, where children and adults up to 50 years of age are diagnosed and treated.