



PRESS RELEASE

The Pan American Health Organization Spearheads Thrust to Develop Policy to Reduce the Harmful Use of Alcohol within Caribbean Countries

Belize City, Belize. On 25-27 June, 2013, the Pan American Health Organization organized a Sub-Regional Meeting on National Alcohol Policy Development with the attendance of thirty three participants representing the Ministries of Health and NGOs (nongovernmental organizations) from English-speaking Caribbean Countries.

The harmful use of alcohol results in 2.5 million deaths each year. Alcohol is the world's third largest risk factor for burden of disease for Non Communicable Diseases; it is the leading risk factor the Americas and in the Western Pacific Region and the second largest in Europe. Each year approximately 320 000 young people between the age of 15 and 29 die from alcohol-related causes, contributing to 9% of all deaths in that age group.

The meeting in Belize was originated from previous meeting of the first Meeting of the Pan American Network on Alcohol and Public Health (PANNAPH) in Mexico City, Mexico in August, 2012. On that occasion, representatives from thirty countries shared their existing policies and programs on alcohol control for further discussions. A number of recommendations were agreed upon at that meeting, to advance the implementation of a Regional Plan of Action on Alcohol. They included the need for a sub-regional meeting with the English Caribbean countries. A major goal was the strengthening of networks on alcohol related issues in order to assist countries in developing appropriate and effective policies to reduce the harmful use of alcohol.

In the Region of Americas, several challenges still remain in tackling prevention and control of the harmful use of alcohol. These include the lack of effective policies in most countries, a powerful alcohol industry that is already seeking to influence policy-making and pressing to participate in the development of alcohol policies, lack of a strong voice from civil society advocating for effective alcohol harm reduction policies, limited technical capacity and financial resources, fear of the economic impact of alcohol policies, culture of excessive drinking combined with widespread sponsorship from the alcohol industry and limited health promotion and health systems' ability to respond to alcohol problems.



The meeting in Belize City was the unique in that it brought together participants from the government and NGOs/civil society in equal representation.

The Healthy Caribbean Coalition and Health Action International Partnership in UK were instrumental in bringing 10 NGOs from Caribbean countries to participate and contribute to the meeting, as well as to receive basic training on alcohol advocacy.

All participants presented and discussed the current progress made, challenges and opportunities for development of alcohol policy, how to integrate alcohol policy as part of National NCD policy and how to effectively implement alcohol policy while protecting public health and safety through multisectoral action involving a wide range of stakeholders such as NGOs and civil society.

International experts contributed to the meeting by presenting scientific evidence regarding the policies that were adopted in the WHO global strategy and the regional plan of action, and discussing strategies for developing alcohol policies which will be culturally adaptable in the context of Caribbean countries.

A road map for alcohol policy development was prepared and presented by national representatives in English-speaking Caribbean Countries as well as strong commitments made by representatives from participating NGOs

PAHO will continue to support Member States in tackling the harmful use of alcohol as one of the leading risk factors contributing overall mortality and morbidity, including non-communicable diseases and mental health, as well as a cause of violence and injuries including traffic accidents. PAHO is the world's oldest public health agency founded in 1902. PAHO serves as the World Health Organization's Regional Office for the Americas.

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Group Photos with the participants, 25-27 June 2013, Belize City





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