



Wilton Park



Report

Latin America and Caribbean regional dialogue on healthy societies

Opportunities and challenges for collective action

Thursday 10 June 2021 | WP1948V2

In partnership with:



Government Offices of Sweden



Alliance
for Health Policy
and Systems Research



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Background

Creating healthy societies requires collective action across different sectors and disciplines. Stakeholders across sectors need to identify shared ideals for healthy societies that they can build into their agendas. While the health sector can steward these efforts, success will require broad engagement and collaboration.

In February 2020, Wilton Park and partners held a dialogue to explore the social, economic and environmental determinants of healthy societies, the promotion of cross-sectoral approaches for better health and the prioritisation of health in other sectoral policies and settings. In partnership with the Government of Sweden and the Alliance for Health Policy and Systems Research, WHO, Wilton Park held a follow-up series to explore how we can deliver healthy societies and healthy populations; the first of these dialogues was held in April 2021 and the second in June 2021.

Ahead of the June event, several smaller regional discussions in Africa, Latin America and the Caribbean, Asia Pacific and Europe and North America explored the visions and narratives for healthy societies. The aims were to explore the plurality of ideas about the narrative and vision for healthy societies and understand the similarities and differences between and within regions and across sectors, disciplines and levels. Through a process of listening and engaging across different levels and sectors, we can collectively build converging ideas around which to align actors and actions.

Participants at these regional meetings did not speak with one voice on behalf of the whole region, but rather represented different sectors and stakeholder groups in order to contribute their perspectives and ideas for future direction and collaboration. Some important stakeholders were not able to attend, so there was an element of bias. These conversations are a starting point and need to be part of a continuing and wider dialogue among the different countries in each region.

This is a report from the Latin American and the Caribbean regional dialogue on healthy societies, held on 10 June 2021. It complements and builds on previous reports from Wilton Park meetings on healthy societies in [February 2020](#) and [March 2021](#).

Introduction

1. The World Health Organization's triple billion targets focus on universal health coverage (UHC), health emergencies and healthy populations. Progress towards meeting the first two targets is well underway, and global and national responses to UHC and health emergencies are evident. The third target of healthy populations, or healthy societies, has become more tangible as a result of COVID-19 but still requires a collective effort to engage meaningfully with the agenda and take action. How do we address structural factors that affect whether people make healthy choices or not? How do we create opportunities and empower people to make healthier choices?
2. The meeting's discussion focused on answering some key questions relating to healthy societies such as what ideas, areas of action and social forces are essential and already engaging to make society healthier? What is enabling efforts to achieve healthy societies and how do we promote this? What is opposing or undermining these efforts and how do we confront this?

"Movements outside of health are creating a healthier planet."

Summary points

- A more holistic, political economy analysis of health and wellbeing can support action around building healthy societies, with equity as a focus.
- A paradigm shift and fresh narrative is needed to inform social thinking, public policy and financing systems away from over-medicalised, disease-focused and singular bio-medical approaches to health.
- Acting on the determinants of health, including immediate determinants such as food and living conditions and deeper structural determinants in political and economic systems is fundamental.
- It is important to transform social protection systems and increase state capacities, policies and use of public subsidies to intervene for change and to create public accountability and enabling environments.
- Activism through existing social movements is key to promoting the healthy societies agenda, especially joining forces with movements whose agenda already supports healthy societies, such as in climate change. Supporting youth as key drivers of wider social movements is a critical area for social justice.

"To have a healthy society we have to stop the destruction of nature."

Main areas of discussion

3. Some main areas of interest to emerge from this Latin America and Caribbean regional discussion included social movements, accountability and the state, the private sector and building a new narrative.

Social movements

4. The COVID-19 pandemic has provided opportunities to affect change with all types of actors and movements mobilising; the challenge is how to be effective. This window of opportunity might not stay open for long and timing is critical.
5. Communities have recognised that inequities and inadequate social protection systems are preventing an effective response to COVID-19 and it is an opportune moment to capitalise on this.
6. A healthy society movement can take action to make non-health sectors and systems foster and invest in health. Civil society and a movement of increasing alliances is a positive driver for a healthy societies movement, and when interconnections across movements and sectors are recognised, we can move forward with a common goal, particularly in the digital era. Youth leadership is critical.
7. A multiplicity of movements is needed to confront neoliberalism and the inequities we face in relation to health. Connecting with movements outside health, particularly

"We don't take account of the forces that are aligned against health."

including those working to create a healthier planet, is vital.

“Will this healthy societies movement institutionalise claims and use processes to make demands and claims rights?”

8. If we are to have healthy societies, then we must work to address climate as an overarching determinant of health. For example, the world is experiencing more frequently extreme weather conditions, with storms and fires destroying habitats and affecting livelihoods, health and wellbeing. Working on health and other global challenges has co-benefits, and we need to bridge the gap between the health and climate communities.
9. Climate action has a huge contribution to make, with food systems and transport as key issues that impact on health. Every meeting has climate on the agenda, which is an opportunity to include healthy societies. Building alliances among movements takes time and we must start now. The healthy societies movement must draw on decades of learning of social activism that has eliminated barriers in laws and policies.
10. We need to be open and sensitive to new local and national realities of political actors and movements beyond the traditional trade unions and political parties in the region. Movements are adopting new constitutions and ways to express themselves. Communities, city level and local governance have become increasingly important.
11. Public policy systems are important in combination with social mobilisation, so there are complimentary top down and bottom up approaches. It is important to have an accountable state, which is robust enough to create the spaces for social mobilisation.

“Movements are needed to confront neoliberalism and the inequities we face.”

“Healthy societies are a product of many different streams and a balance between different parts of society.”

Accountability and the state

12. COVID-19 created opportunities for the health sector to come together with other sectors in a whole of society approach, and with this came increased monitoring and accountability of governments. It is important to use and build on this process.
13. Increased political strength the make the state more accountable and to have stronger democratic and institutional capacity to regulate action, especially from the private sector, is needed. The Chilean experience of regulatory policies working in practice is good to build on.
14. Political mobilisation to demand openness, accountability and increased technical capacity, of the state is essential. However, the lack of democracy and disinformation threatens institutions across the Latin America and Caribbean region.

“We need to be clear about private sector and unhealthy commodities, we have huge concentration in the hands of a few.”

The role of the private sector

15. The healthy societies agenda has not yet had enough focus on the private sector. There are opportunities, especially as during COVID-19 the private sector has understood that having an unequal society is not actually good for business. As independent from governments, the private sector has the potential to support the healthy societies agenda.
16. For example digital connectivity is growing, albeit it with issues of unequal access and potential for harmful disinformation. Big mobile telecom operators are investing in health to maximise their profit, but could the healthy societies agenda work with this and find common positive interest?
17. However, we need to be clear about the private sector and how it promotes unhealthy commodities, with power in the hands of a few. The concentration of power, combined with unhealthy commodities, is damaging society’s health and the planet. It is important to understand financial flows and the relationship with healthy societies.

“How much damage is the concentration of power doing to our health and our planet?”

Creating and communicating a new narrative around healthy societies

18. For the bottom up approach to thrive, the conversation and narrative about healthy

societies needs to change and people's wishes need to be able to heard, not through violence or complaining but through saying this is what I will accept and this is what I will not accept.

“Every recommendation in the health sector is about individual level action: be healthy, do exercise, don't drink. We are stuck in an obsolete paradigm and we need to shift.”

“We need to bridge the health and the climate communities to ensure we are making the co-benefit clearer for people.”

“This is a window of opportunity to see whether the demands for more equity, challenging inequalities and access to health will be met.”

19. We, across sectors, must learn to communicate more effectively around healthy societies. We need to be able to explain to politicians, other sectors and the public what we think it is, before we ask them what they think it is.
20. This means moving from a solely bio-medical and clinical model of an individual's health and reaching into public health spaces across different sectors with a new paradigm. We must overcome the forces that stop us from talking about the social and economic forces on health.
21. An equity lens for healthy societies is crucial. While broadening the lens of 'health' to healthy societies, how do we deal with the inequities and redistribution that needs to take place to achieve equality and justice?
22. The common mindset is that 'health' is contained within the 'health sector'. We need to move beyond this and get the narrative and vocabulary working in a way that expresses a broader notion of healthy societies.
23. The solution to health does not lie in the Ministry of Health or in hospitals. A new paradigm and narrative on healthy societies can widen government departments and ministers' minds, to help them see their own sector as part of a whole system, and that health and society are deeply interconnected.
24. The role of the media in building movements is essential and it is necessary to raise awareness and educate the media early on. This means building a new healthy societies narrative, and packaging and communicating a concrete action agenda, with indicators to show progress.
25. The Americas is the most inequitable region in the world. The 2030 agenda has 247 indicators but not a single indicator measures inequality. How can we leave no one behind if we do not measure it?

Latin America and the Caribbean - Healthy societies action agenda

Participants identified some concrete ways in which to take this agenda forward.

26. Advocate to transform social protection systems and increase state capacities, policies and use of public subsidies to intervene for change and to create public accountability and enabling environments.
27. Connect the healthy societies agenda with existing social movements, especially the climate movement, and find co-benefits for engaging with each other's agendas.
28. Invest in political economy research, as we need to take more account of inequality and the forces that are aligned against creating and sustaining healthy societies.
29. Collect more data, to have a 'head, heart and hand' approach to activism and action for healthy societies.
30. Promote a paradigm shift and create and communicate a new narrative for healthy societies, with conversations and engagement from community level to state level.

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