

# Tackling Alcohol and Substance Abuse in the Americas at the Pan American Health Organization

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## PAN AMERICAN HEALTH ORGANIZATION



The Pan American Health Organization (PAHO) is the specialized health agency of the Inter-American System and the Regional Office of the World Health Organization.

### ALCOHOL POLICY TEAM

- Provides leadership and technical support to Member States on public health policies surrounding alcohol consumption.
- Disseminates knowledge to support evidence-informed policies and interventions.
- Monitors trends in consumption and related problems.

## ALCOHOL CONSUMPTION

### BURDEN OF ALCOHOL USE

In 2016, alcohol was responsible for more than 379,000 deaths.

**Roughly 1 life lost every 100 seconds**

Alcohol use is linked to **200+ health conditions** such as cancer, liver disease, cardiovascular disease, neurological disorders, and more.

Alcohol use varies based on age, sex, gender, income, and inequality. Alcohol consumption is also influenced by alcohol availability, pricing/taxation, marketing regulations, health literacy, and access to screening/healthcare interventions. To reduce alcohol-attributable harms, policies targeting these aspects need to be implemented.



## WHO S.A.F.E.R. INITIATIVE

“A world free from alcohol-related harm”

- S** Strengthen restrictions on alcohol availability
- A** Advance & enforce drink driving counter-measures
- F** Facilitate access to screening, brief interventions
- E** Enforce bans on alcohol advertising, sponsorship
- R** Raise alcohol prices through excise taxes & policies

## PROJECTS

### TECHNICAL ADVISORY GROUP

- Supported the Technical Advisory Group alcohol policy meeting by assisting with the creation of background summary documents and meeting recommendations for the final PAHO report.

### NEEDS ASSESSMENT

- Updated the 2021 needs assessment survey aimed to identify the type of support that Member States anticipate needing from the PAHO Regional Office on alcohol-related activities for 2022-2023.

### FACTSHEETS

- Created official PAHO factsheets on the impacts of alcohol use (e.g., cardiovascular disease, brain health, hepatitis C) to educate the public and improve health literacy.

### COMMUNICATIONS CAMPAIGN

- Assisted with planning the launch of a PAHO alcohol campaign targeted towards the general public and policymakers to challenge and modify social norms surrounding alcohol use and incite support for alcohol control policies.

### PANNAPH NEWSLETTER

- Created summaries of the latest literature on alcohol policy to send to PAHO's mailing list of stakeholders.

## KEY PRACTICUM LEARNINGS

### CHALLENGES

- Understanding the complex organizational structure of PAHO/WHO and how it impacts the approval and progress of on-going projects.
- Familiarizing myself with the landscape of diverse countries in the Americas, as each one has unique policies and societal norms.

### SUCCESSSES

- Broadening my understanding of the social determinants of health and how political factors can play a significant role in the landscape of health in a region.
- Understanding the role of the alcohol industry and political conflicts of interest showed me the limitations of public health faces in creating systemic change and developing healthy communities in the real world.

## MOVING FORWARD

I look forward to using the skills and insight I gained from PAHO on health policy and health promotion to advocate for upstream policies and population-level interventions in my future career in medicine.

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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## REFERENCES

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