

Caribbean Charter for Health Promotion

The 13th Meeting of the Ministers Responsible for Health in the Caribbean, seized of the relevance of Health Promotion as an important and significant process through which the Caribbean people might assume more control over and improve their health, called for the development of a Caribbean Charter for Health Promotion.

In fulfilment of that mandate, 125 persons drawn from the health and other kindred sectors, and representing the social partners active in Caribbean life, met in Port of Spain, Trinidad and Tobago, from the 1st to the 4th of June 1993 at the First Caribbean Conference of Health Promotion.

This cooperative action of Caribbean people in health is in the tradition of previous *efforts*, declarations and initiatives in this field. In 1978 Caribbean Ministers responsible for Health issued the Declaration on Health for the Caribbean Community; in 1986 they launched the Caribbean Cooperation in Health Initiative "as a joint framework for health action and gave it further form and direction in 1992 when they accept a set of Goals and Targets in its priority areas.

The Caribbean actions coincide with those being taken at a hemispheric level and are congruent with the plans and programmes for the implementation of the Health Promotion Strategy as highlighted in the Strategic Orientation and Programme Priorities of the Quadrennium 1991-1994 of the Pan American Health Organization (PAHO).

The countries of the Caribbean are justifiably proud of the gains in health which they have made. However, the governments, conscious of the evidence that health problems of today and tomorrow are increasingly complex and evermore related to social, economic and behavioural factors, believe that this is the moment for a new approach. The urgency for action is heightened not only by the changing patterns of health problems of the people, but also by the adverse effects on their well-being of the structural adjustment programmes that their economies have undergone

Health Promotion

Health promotion is that new approach: in the Caribbean context it will strengthen the capacity of individuals and communities to control, improve, and maintain physical, mental, social and spiritual well-being. It focuses not only on disease prevention and control, but also on health and wellness and advocates that people's health is a positive resource for living.

It demands close collaboration among health and other sectors since the determinants of health status are varied and diverse. Health promotion thus perceived will favour the development of the creativity and productivity of the Caribbean people and seek their spiritual fulfilment in a climate marked by good interpersonal relations and peace.

Opportunities

The Caribbean is well equipped to face the challenges that must come with the acceptance of health promotion as an appropriate approach. The opportunities for successful action include: the existing structures and institutions born out of the rich variety of experiences and resource that its people developed the uniqueness of its culture, its racial and religious tolerance, its recognition of the valuable role of family and friends the personality of its people know for their humour and the pride they display in their music, dance and sport the demonstrable advances its people have made in improving many aspects of their health the achievements in academic excellence

Strategies

The wellness of the Caribbean people that health promotion seeks to enhance will depend on actions taken by individuals and communities to modify crucial ecological and behavioural factors and to provide efficient and effective systems of health care.

The strategies that will ensure the understanding, planning and implementation of the kind of health promotion that adheres to the overriding principle of equity in matters of health include¹ the following:

- 1 formulating public health policy
- 2 reorienting health services
- 3 empowering communities to achieve well-being
- 4 creating supportive environments
- 5 developing/increasing personal health skills
- 6 building alliances with special emphasis on the media

Formulating Public Health Policy

Since all dimensions of the activity of the state will impact on the health status of the people, policy makers must be ever conscious of the impact of these decisions. Multi-sectorial, multi-disciplinary considerations are therefore critical to the formulation of healthy public policy.

Such public policy must emphasize alliances among varied programmes and promote health as a strategic input and priority outcome of development. It must seek consensus among critical actors and sectors and involve the population and its several communities in its definition.

Reorienting Health Services

The implementation of health promotion strategies requires no less than the orientation of the health system to make it more responsive to the health needs of communities and individuals. Health systems that espouse promotion must involve members of the community in its development, and ensure that decisions about services result from genuine local and national participatory and consultative processes.

Such systems will have equity as a central consideration. The allocation of resources and the establishment of programmes are crucial to ensure that health promotion assumes its proper priority position. These systems will be open to the provision of non-traditional services, the conduct of appropriate health research and will legitimize the role of any member of the health team as a leader.

Empowering Communities to Achieve Well-being

Health promotion must build on that aspect of Caribbean Culture that embraces community action and the tradition of the extended family.

Communities will be provided with the information and tools to allow them to take such actions as are needed to improve health and well-being. Proactive community action and participation, as well the community's involvement in determining its priorities for health promotion, must be acknowledged and facilitated by policy makers, health care providers and the media.

Creating Supportive Environments

The success of health promotion will depend in part on the commitment of governments to achieving a healthy physical, social, economic and political environment. All development activities must be guided by the need to sustain and enhance the environment as the Caribbean people aspire to live in healthy countries and healthy cities, to work in healthy places and to have their children attend healthy schools.

In turn, health promotion will advocate a commitment - to securing these aspirations turning to legislation if the need arises

Developing/Increasing Personal Health Skills

Education for personal health must aim to inculcate self-discipline, recognizing the critical importance of early childhood education and take account of the values, beliefs and customs of the community.

The development of these skills is a continuous process and must be facilitated at all stages of life - at home, school, work and leisure.

Individuals will be guided and supported in achieving these goals, rather than having such goals imposed upon them. The responsibility for increasing skills is one shared by all the sources of information and all the media of education and communication.

Building Alliances with Special Emphasis on the Media

Countries and communities have diverse resources that will be brought together in the joint and shared efforts to promote health. Alliances will be formed and coordination sought among all those traditional and non-traditional sectors that impact on health.

The media in all their diversity must be key players in this partnership, bringing their considerable power and influence to bear on the formulation of policies and programmes that affect the health of the people.

It is imperative that there be a reciprocal relationship between the media and health related sectors to ensure free flow of information on matters vital to Caribbean health.

The effectiveness of many of these alliances will depend on the attention paid to training at different levels in the different fields from which the allies for health are drawn.

The Challenge

In this 20th year of the signing of the Treaty of Chaguaramas, it is significant that the Caribbean should seek to examine existing practices and establish new norms to guide action in this unfolding field of health promotion. It is fitting that the Ministers of

Health should adopt this Charter and so strive and work in collaboration with all the relevant social partners to take actions that can transform this Charter into a living instrument that will maintain and improve the health of the region.

This is the challenge!