

Statement by PHM Brazil on the Covid-19 pandemic

PHM joins the Brazilian people and their movements and social organizations, in the defense and strengthening of the Unified Health System (SUS), the universal access public system established in 1988 and based on right to health, to contain the proliferation of Covid-19 in the national territory.

Despite the financing difficulties to which it has been subjected since its creation, especially in recent years and which compromise its full action, we reiterate that SUS, as universal and equity based system, is the best way to contain the effects of this pandemic!

Our reality today is of deep social inequalities, economic stagnation, dismantling of public health systems and social protection and accelerated increase of poverty, which affects mostly vulnerable groups.

The health of our people demands the strengthening of SUS and of other social policies aimed at reducing inequalities and providing social protection.

We reaffirm the struggle for the right to health, for a new model of society, with more solidarity, empathy, equity and humanity.

Current diagnosis

- The SUS is under funded by austerity measures, worsened in the last two governments. Constitutional Amendment 95 of 2016 establishes a public expenditure cap for 20 years, affecting health, education and the state capacity to tackle social issues and economics issues, including this pandemic.
- In addition, the current Government's economic policy has affected all social determinants of health with worsening indicators and resurgence of other diseases such as dengue, measles and yellow fever. National census data for 2019 and 2020 show that the unemployment rate in the quarter ended in January 2020 reached 11.2%, or almost 12 million unemployed. Informal population reached 38.6 million workers in 2019, entered into without social protection labor market (Source: IBGE, 2019, 2020).
- Primary healthcare has attacked in different means. In 2019, government cancelled the Brazil/PAHO partnership (Programa Mais Médicos) for

bringing community doctors from abroad to isolated and vulnerable communities. The Family Health Strategy, a key component of Brazilian health policy established in 2003, well assessed nationally, and internationally is being threatened.

- Bolsa Família Project, one of the biggest income transfer policies in the world, is being reduced within social spending cutting strategy. The program is highly effective, costing less than 1% of the national GDP, and works very well to improve social determinants associated indicators, such as access to food and water, vaccination, education and housing.
- Regionalized networks are still fragile and hospital care has problems is lacking workforce and facilities. It is estimated that since 2010, SUS has lost more than 34 thousand beds.
- The country still faces the challenge of dealing with an aggressive environmental policy from the Bolsonaro government, which disrespects basic rights of traditional communities and eases the protection of forests in indigenous and quilombola areas.
- Brazil has strong research institutions (e.g Fiocruz) and a set of public pharmaceutical laboratories capable of producing medicines and products at a cost much lower than the price charged by the pharmaceutical industry. For instance, two Brazilian public laboratories even have the capacity to produce chloroquine, a drug under study for treating Covid-19.

Proposals to be implemented on an urgent and emergency basis by governments at the federal, state and municipal levels

- Supply and immediate distribution of supplies and equipment for the protection of health professionals in all health services and for patients.
- Immediate hiring of health professionals to assist in care activities.
- Equip hospitals and ICUs with adequate supplies and train the workforce with guidelines on how to proceed - organize internal care flows.
- Make all beds of public and private services available in a unified setting to respond Covid-19 pandemic.

- Immediate economic protection for informal and formal workers to mitigate the economic effects of social isolation.
- Immediate economic protection for all the vulnerable. For this, there is an urgent need to interrupt the current reduction of resources for social programs (such as Bolsa Família and the Benefit of Continuous Provision - BPC, for the elderly and people with disabilities), as well as creating protection mechanisms for the most vulnerable, such as Basic Income (already approved on the legislative national body).
- Immediate free provision of personal hygiene products for people without access.
- Creation of Emergency Committees to Fight Hunger and strengthen family farming.
- Reactivation of public food stocks.
- Creation of Local Committees in slums and other poor communities to monitor the progress of Covid-19 and communicate practical preventive measures.
- Investments in research to face the pandemic, as well as in public production of medicines and other health technologies.
- Compulsory licensing of any health technology that may be made available for treatment of Covid-19, as did by other countries, e.g. Canada.
- There is an urgent need to revoke EC 95 and open an emergency public fund to strengthen SUS, protect the population and guarantee decent working conditions for health professionals.
- Strengthening of the Unified Health System with immediate expansion of its financing and agile transfers to states and municipalities to supply protection supplies, hire staff, equip hospitals and ICUs .
- SUS funding must be adequate and achieve investments, as recommended by PAHO, of at least 6% of GDP, in public health expenditures and of these 30% in PHC, to guarantee its daily functioning efficiently and with quality and to be ready to respond to new emergencies and everyday health care needs .

Finally, we know that a change in the economic model is necessary, with effective income distribution policies and reformulation of the tax system, in education and in social protection. We believe that a new world is about to come after this pandemic crisis. The suffering and the challenges of these days show that ideas like austerity, market based societies and profit before people approaches have failed to meet humanity need. We struggle for a new social and economic model, based on equity, balance and extreme inequality reduction. This thesis is not about forgetting economic challenges, but about embracing them as the main task of our generation and taking as premise that health is a right.