

Dr. Enrique Vega Garcia  
June 3, 1962- June 4, 2025

With great sadness, we pay tribute to a Friend of AFSM, Public Health and Geriatric Leader in the Region, and a dear friend and Colleague to many AFSM members.

Enrique was born in Cuba. He became an internal medicine doctor and obtained his Geriatric training in Sweden. He served in Ethiopia first, on his return to Cuba, he dedicated his life to caring for older persons at the (CITED) - A research center for healthy aging in the Calixto Garcia Hospital. Later in the Ministry of Health, he was responsible for the national program for older persons. Dr. Vega was a professor and a researcher, but never forgot the work in the clinic. He was particularly proud of his work with Cuban centenarians.

In 2005, PAHO named him Regional Advisor on Health and Aging, a young program with few resources and a lack of priority in most Ministries of Health in the Region. However, Enrique knew that was about to change fast. At PAHO, Enrique demonstrated his resilience and ability to find solutions.

With a highly practical vision, he prioritized the development of virtual courses to build competencies in the Region's health systems. Through these courses, he introduced concepts and tools and sharpened the ability of health care centers to respond to the needs of older persons: “the new users of health services.”

He worked closely with important allies. In 2002, the Latin American Academy of Medicine for Older Adults (ALMA) was created with the support of PAHO. Enrique was one of the academy's Founding Members. ALMA's mission was to serve as a venue for Professors of Geriatric Medicine across Medical Schools in the Region and to ensure that Geriatric knowledge was systematized and built across medical and public health education.

Enrique knew the need to convene, support, and collaborate with community-based organizations and social services for older adults. Eventually, these partners became essential allies in building Age-Friendly Communities and promoting the Decade of Healthy Aging.

He became the chief of the Life Course and Aging Unit, and when Patricia Morsch was named his replacement in the Aging and Health program, he ensured that the health of older adults would now have two champions within PAHO.

Enrique was a loyal friend and collaborator of AFSM. He counted the days until he, too, would join our ranks. He believed former PAHO staff members were retired

from work at PAHO but never from life. He admired the contributions that former staff members continued to make to the health and well-being of their communities and often looked for ways to involve us in supporting healthy aging. His colleagues at PAHO have published an editorial in memoriam of Enrique in the PAHO Journal of Public Health. They write: “Dr. Vega believed that aging was not a problem to be solved but a natural process to be understood, embraced, and supported. He persistently advocated for a shift in how we feel, think, and act about aging.” We will continue to support Dr. Vega’s legacy, “the re-humanization of aging policy, in research, and practice.”

PAHO held a memorial service for Dr. Vega on June 12. Many colleagues throughout the region joined the service via Zoom.

[https://paho-org.zoom.us/rec/play/Adz-ooxGTc6kqrL5MhfL87OTkvtkNG\\_nqS6XEAzxDY9ahHfQ2OQZ8wb7y48FgvYT\\_4Rv7Plqp8-UU9b.7BghQSvD7J3LrO0h?eagerLoadZvaPages=sidemenu.billing.plan\\_management&accessLevel=meeting&canPlayFromShare=true&from=share\\_recording\\_detail&continueMode=true&componentName=rec-play&originRequestUrl=https://paho-org.zoom.us/rec/share/Y88XxqBwrbSI9nWRcu9FcSdl0VnkHney9alt0kK0g3KPGyBRLm9IBJKAQleb1Cjq.3J9pOFN2TVSKETC](https://paho-org.zoom.us/rec/play/Adz-ooxGTc6kqrL5MhfL87OTkvtkNG_nqS6XEAzxDY9ahHfQ2OQZ8wb7y48FgvYT_4Rv7Plqp8-UU9b.7BghQSvD7J3LrO0h?eagerLoadZvaPages=sidemenu.billing.plan_management&accessLevel=meeting&canPlayFromShare=true&from=share_recording_detail&continueMode=true&componentName=rec-play&originRequestUrl=https://paho-org.zoom.us/rec/share/Y88XxqBwrbSI9nWRcu9FcSdl0VnkHney9alt0kK0g3KPGyBRLm9IBJKAQleb1Cjq.3J9pOFN2TVSKETC)