



# NEWSLETTER

THE ASSOCIATION OF FORMER PAHO/WHO STAFF MEMBERS

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2025 Annual AFSM General Meeting

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After a hiatus of almost five years, we finally had the opportunity of having again our Spring Luncheon. You can get the presentations in a separate article of this bulletin, as well as enjoy a video in our website <https://www.afsmpaho.com/afsm-general-meetings>. There you can see how important it is for us of a certain generation to meet face to face. Nothing is wrong with a virtual meeting to learn or exchange information, but nothing beats the real thing.

We have stated several times that AFSM is not only for Washington residents. That is why the Board meetings as well as all important meetings are always online. And we will try to arrange for a future meeting (the formal one) in one of our countries, or a cruise, or some arrangement where we can meet our members regardless of place of living. In any event, and since the topic of immigration to the USA -of interest to people living outside as well as to future members- was covered in depth by our guests, you can review the presentations as mentioned above.

While we had a very friendly (and noisy) activity, where friendships were rediscovered, it was impossible to ignore the elephant in the room: the exit of the United States from WHO, which we covered in our past editorial in detail, as well as its implications for former staff. Unfortunately, we still have no clarity in the position of the USA (and some followers like Argentina and El Salvador) towards PAHO proper, that in the Interamerican System agency, as opposed to AMRO, part of the UN system. In the US proposed budget approved by the House of Representatives, there is no money for regular funding of the UN; only for extra budgetary activities. Even though the OAS is mentioned, and seems to be receiving a US contribution, PAHO is not mentioned. Please note that the budget still has to pass the Senate, where other forces intervene. But the point is that two years ago it would have been inconceivable that the US would refuse to cooperate with a system founded with heavy US involvement after World War II, so it is not just a question of money anymore, but of the survival of the system as we knew it. Anecdotally, projects in the World Bank may not include equity, climate change and the like in their objectives. So, there is a straight application to the “anti-woke” culture we are living in. Again, the Pension Fund is outside of this discussion, so no need to worry at the personal level. We will continue monitoring the situation and inform you as needed, of course.

We continue being very involved in activities with our cousins in other organizations. When you read this, we will have met online with the Council of AFSMs. Even though we were invited by Dr. Tedros to meet in Geneva over the last two years, for obvious reasons that meeting year will be virtual. Another casualty of the withdrawal of the US. We are in constant contact with AFSM Geneva, which, in turn, keeps close tabs on the WHO developments. It is unlikely that further developments in the institutionalization of AFSM in WHO will have too much priority under present conditions, but we need to make sure there is no back either.

In October we are hosting the meeting of ARAIO, the Association of Former staff of the agencies with an office in Washington. These include the World Bank, IMF, OAS and the local chapter of AFICS (UN). It will be very interesting to exchange views with our more distant “relatives” on how the events covered above are affecting them.

So, we keep very busy and always encourage you to participate in any way it accommodates you, either in your country or regionally. For those in the Northern Hemisphere, have a jolly summer, and

for our friends in the South, protect yourselves from the cold. Our luncheon and other activities are open to all members, so join if you happen to be in Washington when one is held there. We understand if you are not able to join us in Washington but try to meet with colleagues in your place. It is very rewarding.



## Welcome to our new members

**María Elena Cimino, USA**

**Silvia García, USA**

**Vilma Gawryszewski, Brazil**

## Summary Report of the 2025 AFSM Annual General Meeting

By Juan Manuel Sotelo



The 2025 Annual PAHO AFSM General Meeting was held on the PAHO premises on 3 December 2025. Hernan Rosenberg, the President of PAHO AFSM opened the session at 10:35 AM, welcoming all the participants, thanking PAHO for its support, and proposing Matilde Pinto as Chairperson. Matilde requested that the assembly adopt the agenda for the meeting and introduced Ms. Kristan Beck, PAHO/WHO Director of Administration, to address the participants on behalf of PAHO's Director. Ms. Beck conveyed Dr. Jarbas Barbosa's greetings and made

mention of the excellent and productive relations between PAHO and the AFSM. Ms. Beck highlighted the participation of AFSM on the Walk for Health, the signing of a MOU between PAHO and AFSM, the attendance of AFSM at the Governing Bodies Meetings, participation in the Pre-Retirement Seminars, and support to retirees in the countries.

Antonio Hernandez led the participants in a Minute of Silence to Honor the 2025 fallen colleagues: Clara Ines Rubiano Pulido, Luis Odría, German Enrique Mora, and Nerey Placido Cotrina Perez.

Hernan Rosenberg presented the Annual Report of the PAHO AFSM President, covering the situation of retirees in the Region, their health insurance and pension matters, as well as the permanent communication with PAHO to assist in different situations. He was thankful to the PAHO Director for his kind willingness to allow PAHO AFSM participation in relevant PAHO meetings, including the



Governing Bodies Meetings. PAHO AFSM is continually active with the Global Council of AFSMs, and he expressed appreciation to Dr. Tedros for his continued support. On 4 November PAHO hosted the annual meeting of ARAIO, an association of associations of retirees from many International Organizations. AFSM will participate in a meeting on 9 December with the Global Council of AFSMs.

Sylvia Schultz, AFSM Treasurer, presented the 2025 Treasurer's and Auditor's Report.



Miguel Boluda, Chief Executive Officer of PAHO/WHO Federal Credit Union made a presentation on the current situation and plans for the future of the Credit Union. These plans include the association with other credit unions from different institutions, most likely with the Georgetown and George Washington Universities and others. This is to increase the number of members and make sustainable growth in the use of technology, and participation in cost sharing. Some requirements were outlined for non-US residents with forms that need to be completed. Rolando Chacon reported on AFSM Elections for Board Members with no candidates being presented, a situation that will

change for 2026. Participation in the Board's work is being encouraged.

Hugo Prado, AFSM Vice President reported on the Countries Focal Points activities and mentioned the different progress and challenges ahead.

Violeta Mata informed on Facebook, Instagram, and Website progress and plans to enhance participation. Violeta mentioned the efforts of Marilyn Rice as Editor-in-Chief of the Newsletter and the need to search for a replacement as she steps down from this function after 15 years.



Alberto Concha, President of the Colombia Chapter shared the progress made in his country and the plans for the future. He described the many activities that are being promoted and the good communication with the country PAHO/WHO Representation.

Jean Paul Menu and Sue Block Tyrell from AFSM Geneva informed on the different WHO Regions activities as well as in HQ. He stressed the important support and personal participation of Dr. Tedros, WHO DG.

Chris Saenz, Coordinator of PAHO Pension, Staff Health Insurance (SHI), and Life Insurance together with Omarys

Nieves made a presentation on recent developments in SHI, the staff participation and training efforts for retiree and active PAHO staff.

Matilde Pinto thanked everyone for their active participation and closed the meeting at 12:45 PM.



As usual, we will start with some predominant health issues. This list can grow or shrink from issue to issue. A disease's disappearance from the list does not mean that it is no longer of concern, but that there is no new significant information regarding that threat. This issue has a broader range of information, going beyond risks and incorporating information to know.

### Measles

Vaccination records improved in 2024 to 88% first dose, however it still remained lower than the 95% estimated to be needed for eradication. Second dose, needed for full protection, is considerably lower. Canada, unfortunately continued with sustained outbreaks in 2025, resulting in the loss of measles elimination status for both Canada and the Region of the Americas.

### Covid-19

As of the first week of November, 24 countries in the Americas with a concentration in the temperate zone of South America demonstrated 6.7% positivity in systematically collected virological surveys. That translates into 33,608 reported cases in the preceding 28 days. Globally the Americas Region is only second in incidence to Europe. There is encouraging news: hospitalizations, ICU admissions and deaths are only a small percentage of what was seen previously.

### Long Covid

Also known as post-Covid syndrome, occurs when an individual has Covid-19 symptoms for more than 12 weeks. There is exciting, although primary news on this front. Harvard Medical School Long Covid researchers have recently published (end of November in Nature Communications) a study under the National Institutes of Health identifying eight different patterns of manifestation of Long Covid. It is the first classification within this disease that, because of its many differences in symptomatology among sufferers, has been difficult to understand. Most of the subjects in the research were Covid victims during the Omicron variant. The study also produced concerning information. 14% of Long Covid sufferers were not classified as such at three months after infection but developed symptoms gradually over 15 months. While only the first step is significant, further study and testing of the patterns can lead to identification of support and resources needed to relieve these long-term sufferers.

### Vaccines

Since vaccines and their uses have been in many news stories recently, and one often does not have the resources to consult and judge the informational sources, it is worthwhile to remind ourselves that, should we need some assistance in decision making on vaccines, the World Health Organization has a special topic section providing evidence-based information and resources about vaccines for all ages. <https://www.who.int/teams/immunization-vaccines-and-biologicals/diseases/vaccination-information-hub>

### Hypertension

WHO defines *clinical hypertension* in adults as systolic blood pressure  $\geq 140$  mmHg and/or diastolic blood pressure  $\geq 90$  mmHg on two different days. By contrast, *high blood pressure* can increase the risk

of heart and kidney disease even at levels below this threshold. For example, systolic blood pressure under 130 mmHg — though not classified as hypertension — can still raise health risks. It is estimated that 1.4 billion people manifested some type of hypertension, yet only a scarce 20% have their hypertension under control. Since this problem can lead to heart attack, stroke, kidney disease, and dementia, it is wise, and health and longevity promoting, to seek and maintain support for controlling this malady. Key risk factors to be controlled are inadequate physical activity, diet, particularly salt and trans-fat, alcohol and tobacco use, and system and educational inadequacies. Since it is normal for blood pressure to rise in senior years, a yearly checkup on blood pressure is a recommended pro health activity.

### **Cognitive Decline**

No there is no magic pill or bullet. Work continues to be done, with a fair number of new pharmacological trials in motion for treatment of Alzheimer's disease. There is research ongoing on identifying blood markers to identify symptoms in the early stage or even before manifestations occur. Recommendations are to continue healthy living practices: staying active, eating healthy, sleeping 7 hours quality sleep per night, maintaining social connections, and exercising/stimulating the mind: reading, games, learning new skills etc., AND if you begin to note more forgetfulness, losing things, seek a professional opinion. The sooner that cognitive decline is identified, the better. Often small lifestyle changes can delay symptoms. Tom Freiden has an excellent article in the Wall Street Journal on 10 October 2025 called "The Simple Steps that can Prevent Dementia." [https://www.wsj.com/health/wellness/the-simple-steps-that-can-prevent-dementia-9fb5957a?gaa\\_at=eafs&gaa\\_n=AWEtsqc0zis7xCEUY8-yj-SI9M92Yy9fiYltpeonvOskey1pa\\_VmigiP3mQHbsshtUS4%3D&gaa\\_ts=692f8d99&gaa\\_sig=eTXISeg9oSzbwkYCPeE1a-i550mzlkA5JLYH5DJihz9WMCYMOB7L0rqdg6OUdUVR5MUHX29-YnjkwAqU3LPWEA%3D%3D](https://www.wsj.com/health/wellness/the-simple-steps-that-can-prevent-dementia-9fb5957a?gaa_at=eafs&gaa_n=AWEtsqc0zis7xCEUY8-yj-SI9M92Yy9fiYltpeonvOskey1pa_VmigiP3mQHbsshtUS4%3D&gaa_ts=692f8d99&gaa_sig=eTXISeg9oSzbwkYCPeE1a-i550mzlkA5JLYH5DJihz9WMCYMOB7L0rqdg6OUdUVR5MUHX29-YnjkwAqU3LPWEA%3D%3D)

### **Other Health News**

Lancet, the health Journal has been doing podcasts on current topics and regional summaries of important health information. They have just separated the podcasts from the magazine in an effort to provide better access.

WHO has recently published the first global guidelines on infertility and the use of GLP-1 medicines in controlling obesity.

The United Climate Change Conference COP 30 held in Belém, Brazil in mid-November had ups and downs and comments on the outcomes are mixed. A full commitment plan was impossible with opposition from the petroleum states and the absence of the world's largest pollution country. One notable observation was that action is becoming more local, with cities and states planning and committing to what the countries have not. Some achievements: increased financial commitments for low carbon transition, recognition of Indigenous Peoples, tropical forest conservation fund, private sector increased involvement. Health also featured prominently. The World Health Organization launched the Belém Health Action Plan, citing 60 actions necessary to both adapt to climate change and address climate-related health risks affecting 3.3 billion people. Over thirty countries endorsed the plan and agreed to report their progress during the next Global Stocktake at COP33 in 2028.

### **News from Geneva**

The Global Oversight Committee, the senior governing body for our Staff Health Insurance, met in mid-November. Some of their news:

- The Region of the Americas was first in satisfaction and fastest in claims processing. Congratulations!

- SHI has launched an RFP for a new global claims processing software. This software, due to replace the now obsolete systems in place will be the main element in what is proposed to be a Center of Excellence for SHI operations when implemented in 2027. Bids are under evaluation until the end of the year and if a vendor is selected, the new system will be constructed, assessed and adapted during 2026 and the early part of 2027.
- Since the Region of the Americas was studying different ways of managing the claims processing, considering outsourcing and/or using a third-party administrator, there was discussion as to opening the PAHO consideration to examining the Center of Excellence model as a third option. As there are many considerations: financial, staffing, reserves etc., as well as costs of the changes themselves, both in Geneva and in Washington, we will keep you informed as things progress.
- The benchmarking exercise in which the benefits, costs, management etc. across similar international companies is conducted every several years has been completed. Already known is that the WHO SHI ranked first in Preventative measures including vaccines but fell behind several others such as hospitalization benefits. There will be a working group constituted to examine the SHI Rules and suggest changes after the first of 2026, so we will probably be seeing some possible expansion of benefits by 2027 if costs are enabled.

### CHANGES IN CONTACT INFORMATION?

Let us know! It is important for us to keep in touch. If you moved or changed your email address, phone number, please send the new information to our Membership Chair Karen Gladbach at [gladbach.afsm@gmail.com](mailto:gladbach.afsm@gmail.com)

## Launch of the UN Digital ID App Pension Features for UNICEF

The UNJSPF and UNICEF are excited to announce the launch of the UN Digital ID app for United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) retiring staff. Based on the successful experience and technology used for the UNJSPF digital identity solution, the Digital Certificate of Entitlement, the UN Digital ID is a groundbreaking initiative aimed at revolutionizing data quality and accountability. By streamlining data exchange across systems and organizations, it enhances transparency and efficiency, ultimately improving the client experience throughout the separation process.

This launch, part of the broader UN Digital ID program, represents a significant step forward in digital transformation within the United Nations system. The first version of the UN Digital ID was successfully launched in June 2024, with the World Food Programme (WFP) and UNJSPF focusing on the first use case related to pension processing. After United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) and the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), UNICEF is now the fourth UN agency rolling out the pension use case to its staff.

The UN Digital ID is a universal, easy-to-use system-wide identity for all United Nations staff, from onboarding to retirement. This unique identification system aims to reduce data fragmentation and duplication, thereby simplifying and streamlining processes and transactions across all business functions between staff and organizations, as well as between UN organizations themselves.

Rosemarie McClean, Chief Executive of Pension Administration, commented: “The UNJSPF is proud to be at the forefront of this digital transformation, and work with UNICC (United Nations International Computing Centre) towards a more connected and efficient United Nations. We look forward to the continued expansion and success of the UN Digital ID program, ultimately benefiting all UN staff and organizations.”

Following this successful launch, the UN Digital ID program aims to scale to even more organizations and use cases across the UN system, including the UN Secretariat. Future expansions will include additional functionalities such as verification of mandatory training and facilitation of inter-agency staff movements.

## AFSM Members Join the PAHO Walk for Health

By Karen Gladbach



PAHO retirees and their families and pets joined health officials from across the region, PAHO staff and their families, and Washington, D.C. area residents for the 21st *PAHO Walk for Health* on Sunday, 28 September. The Walk is an annual tradition that promotes physical activity and collective well-being—and offers an opportunity for PAHO retirees to reconnect with former colleagues.



# Annual Meeting of the Association of Retirees of the Associations of International Organizations, ARAIO, 2025

Por Juan Manuel Sotelo

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Hernan Rosenberg, PAHO AFSM President, chaired the meeting and introduced Dr. Rhonda Sealey-Thomas, PAHO Assistant Director, who gave welcome remarks on behalf of Dr. Jarbas Barbosa PAHO Director, who was out of the country.

The president invited participants to introduce themselves. This year the meeting had thirty presential and fifteen virtual participants.

According to the Agenda, each Association made a review of the past year with the highlights including main events, elections, and pending matters. This year the meeting had the participation of OECD, in addition to AFSM PAHO, 1818 (The World Bank), IDB, OAS, IMFRA, Asian Dev Bank, and AFICS.

There was a panel discussion on *Present Global Situation and the International Organizations* with speakers from the World Bank, OECD, and PAHO AFSM.

There were two plenary sessions, one on the Health Insurance and another on the International System (USA not taking part, modifications of the multilateral system, decreasing staff numbers, lack of participation, geographical dispersion, more bilateralism, and ideas to challenge).

During lunchtime Dr. Martha Pelaez made a presentation on Healthy Longevity, followed by a discussion.

The participants were placed into discussion groups, and then each group presented their conclusions in plenary for general discussion and for the identification of opportunities.

The OAS representative was selected to organize the next annual meeting and the World Bank as an alternative.

The Meeting had high levels of participation and there were numerous expressions of satisfaction with the agenda and organization.

## Report of the 20<sup>th</sup> Assembly of the Association of Former PAHO Staff, Colombia Chapter (AFSM/CC)

Por Ricardo Torres

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The meeting was held on 17 October 2025, at the PAHO/WHO office in Bogotá. Twenty-eight members participated both in person and virtually. Management and financial reports, the work plan, and the budget for 2025-2026 were presented. PAHO's cooperation strategy with Colombia for the period 2024-2026 was reviewed and discussed, and concerns were shared regarding PAHO's financial situation following the United States' withdrawal from WHO. The meeting concluded with the

presentation of updates on the pension and health insurance systems, amendments to the association's bylaws, and the election of the new board of directors for the 2025-2027 term.

### **Topics discussed in the AFSM Colombia Chapter Ordinary Assembly**

Alberto Concha presented the report from the President of the AFSM Colombia Chapter, highlighting the teamwork involved in establishing agreements with local clinics, cultural activities, and the need to renew the Board of Directors. Attendees discussed topics such as technological development, especially artificial intelligence, and the importance of healthy ageing. Suggestions were made for future activities, including trips to different regions of the country and greater outreach on public health issues.

Ricardo Torres, in his role as Treasurer, presented the chapter's financial report, which was approved, including an increased budget for the photography contest. The possibility of organizing in-person meetings outside of Bogotá to strengthen group cohesion was also discussed.

Regarding the photography contest, it was emphasized that edits using artificial intelligence are not accepted, and the need for greater promotion of the contest was mentioned.

Hernán Rosenberg, President of AFSM, presented his report on the financial situation of PAHO (included in the president's report in this newsletter). Regarding the pension system, he explained that, although - according to an actuarial study, it is currently funded for the next 30 years, and the decline in permanent employment and political tensions could affect the system in the long term. Likewise, one of the participants noted that the aforementioned actuarial study is from 2023 and therefore does not reflect current geopolitical changes, suggesting that a new evaluation is needed.

Gina Tambini, PWR/Colombia, reported on the 2025 Directing Council meeting. In this context, she presented PAHO's cooperation strategy with Colombia for the period 2024-2026 and confirmed that the United States has not formally withdrawn from PAHO, although a sizable portion of its contribution remains outstanding.

Carol Collado (AFSM Focal Point for health insurance) presented the changes to the health insurance system that came into effect in July 2025 (text available on the AFSM website), highlighting that the format was modified to make it more accessible and that the available benefits are more specifically specified, including vaccines covered. Carol Collado (AFSM Focal Point for Health Insurance) presented the changes to the health insurance system that came into effect in July 2025 (text available on the AFSM website), highlighting that the format was modified to make it 100% more accessible and that the available benefits are better specified, including vaccines covered 100%.

Other significant changes at PAHO that will affect the health insurance system include the relocation of general services from Washington to Panama, and the elimination of positions in Washington starting 1 June.

Hugo Prado, Vice President of AFSM and liaison with the country focal points, presented their roles and responsibilities, reiterating their function as a link between local officials and the board of directors. He stated that Colombia has a well-organized chapter with thirty-six participants, with María Mercedes Rodríguez serving as the AFSM-CC focal point. The participants discussed the need to share information on cultural and exchange activities between countries, and Hugo agreed to improve the dissemination of these activities through the focal points.

Colleagues from the Credit Union, Gisela Lanzone and Esteban Arce, presented updates on the savings and credit union's services, explaining available products, membership requirements, and

current interest rates. The presentation included information on the W8-BEN form, which must be completed every three years, and reminders about the importance of keeping contact information up to date.

This section focused on Gisela's presentation on account management and W8-BEN forms, where she explained the differences between joint owners and beneficiaries, and the importance of completing these forms every three years. Participants discussed the implementation of a new banking system in November or January, which will require updating contact information and downloading new mobile applications. Esteban and Miguel Boluda explained the reasons for canceling inactive Platinum Program Credit Cards, highlighting security and cost issues, and advised members to apply for Rewards Cards as a more economical alternative with better benefits.

Regarding the Board of Directors, María Mercedes bid farewell to her role on it, alluding to her 37 years of service at PAHO, which began in the Anti-Aedes-Aegypti Program, thanking many colleagues and expressing her gratitude.

The team discussed modifications to the association's bylaws, particularly regarding the associate member category and their rights. The AFSM-CC President proposed postponing a full revision of the bylaws until they are better prepared, suggesting that the board review them first and then present them to the assembly. At this point, Gina Tambini, PWR/Colombia, was named an honorary member.

According to the election, the new Board of Directors for 2025-2027 was made up of Alberto Concha, President; Gerardo Galvis, Vice President; Gladys Ghisays, Secretary; Ricardo Torres, Treasurer; María Mercedes Rodríguez, member at large 1, Santiago Nichols, member at large 2, and Rafael López, member at large 3.

The meeting concluded with the assignment of tasks for both the Board of Directors and some members, as well as for the AFSM.

## 80th Anniversary of the United Nations Celebration, Mexico 2025

Por Violeta Mata García



In keeping with the framework of this commemoration, the Board of Directors of the Association of Retired Officials of the United Nations System in Mexico organized the following activities, among other events, to commemorate this important milestone.

**Friday, 24 de octubre 2025**

A tribute was given for all retired staff up to the present date, in the United Nations Plaza, located in the Americas Park. This Plaza was inaugurated by Mr. Boutros Boutros Gali during his period as Resident Representative of the United Nations in Mexico. One of our PAHO AFSM Focal Point in Mexico, Violeta Mata Garcia participated in this event.



A social event was held at the Mexican Navy's Naval Club North, where, in addition to a meal and social gathering, awards were presented to colleagues who had been retired for 15, 20, 25, 30, and more than 30 years.

In the case of PAHO/WHO, one of our retired staff members received recognition for 25 years of service. Another of our PAHO AFSM Focal Points in Mexico, Maria Angélica Bartolo participated in this event.



Honorees celebrating 20 years of retirement, including Maria Luz Diaz Martha and Adriana Romero, President and Vice President of AFPNU, respectively.



Source: Association of Retired United Nations Staff in Mexico

# Summary of the Webinar on Caregivers of Older Adults

Brief notes by Juan Manuel Sotelo

at the request of the Healthy Longevity Committee

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On October 21, a webinar on Caregivers for Older Adults was held, coordinated by Martha Peláez and Patricia Morsh. The panelists, who shared their experiences as caregivers, were Peter Carr, Carol Collado, and Martha Peláez. This was a joint activity between PAHO and AFSM.

This meeting highlighted the inseparable bond between giving and receiving care. Dr. Morsh informed us of the magnitude of the situation in the Americas, with the realization that one in five people are over sixty-five and that many of them require support for their healthcare.

Neither health nor insurance systems are prepared to meet the challenge, despite reform efforts toward sustainable health systems based on primary care. Technologies such as hearing, vision, or mobility aids that enhance the capabilities of older adults are still in their infancy, and access to them is limited.

The testimonies of our former colleagues about their circumstances and those of their families made us reflect on our particular case, as well as our surroundings, projected into the coming years.

You can see and hear the webinar in English and Spanish at:

[A Talk About Caregiving with Caregivers: AFSM Webinar - PAHO/WHO | Pan American Health Organization](#)

The Healthy Ageing Committee, now renamed the Healthy Longevity Committee, is concerned about this issue and is developing a work agenda for next year to address these challenges. This newsletter invites you to submit suggestions for topics and potential speakers related to older adults to Martha Pelaez at: [pelaezma@earthlink.net](mailto:pelaezma@earthlink.net)

## The Importance of Sleep for Our Health

Por María Teresa Cerqueira

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How much sleep you need changes with age. Adults need at least seven hours of sleep each night. As you get older, you need to pay attention not only to the amount of time sleeping but its quality. Retirement, the loss of a spouse, stress, and overload in caregiving can affect the quality of your sleep. Older adults are more likely to take medications that interfere with sleep. Many people can gain weight because of a lack of sleep. Their bodies' ability to control blood sugar levels is

impaired. One in three adults do not regularly get the recommended amount of uninterrupted sleep needed to protect their health.

Some people have sleep disorders that prevent them from getting enough quality sleep, no matter how hard they try. 50 to 70 million Americans have a sleep disorder. The most common is insomnia. Insomnia is when you have repeated difficulty getting to sleep and/or staying asleep. Sleep apnea is

another common sleep disorder. In sleep apnea, the upper airway becomes obstructed during sleep. This reduces or stops airflow, which wakes people up, and they pause breathing frequently during the night. The condition can be dangerous. If untreated, it may lead to other health problems such as obesity and heart disease, among others. Another sleep disorder is restless leg syndrome, a neurological condition that causes an irresistible urge to move the legs. Narcolepsy is a chronic disorder that makes people very sleepy during the day and disrupts their sleep at night. People living with narcolepsy fall asleep without warning during daily activities such as eating, working, or driving. All of these conditions require medical attention.

Getting enough sleep and good sleep quality are essential for healthy ageing. Adults sixty-one and older need at least 8-9 hours of sleep. Recommendations from the references listed at the end of this article indicate getting enough sleep can help you:

- Get sick less often.
- Stay at a healthy weight.
- Reduce stress and improve mood.
- Improve heart health and metabolism.
- Lower risk of chronic conditions.
- Lessen the risk of motor vehicle crashes and related injury or death.
- Improve attention and memory to better perform daily activities.

It is important to review and correct any sleep issues and incorporate good habits. Suggestions to get quality night's sleep include:

- Create a good sleeping environment. Get rid of sound and light distractions.
- Limit electronics before bed; turn off electronics at least 30 minutes before bedtime.
- Avoid nicotine and caffeine. Both are stimulants that keep you awake. Caffeine can take 6–8 hours to wear off completely.
- Avoid alcohol and large meals before bedtime. Both can prevent deep, restorative sleep.
- Go outside and try to get natural sunlight for at least 30 minutes every day.
- If you take naps mid-afternoon, keep them short, less than 10 minutes.
- Do not lie in bed awake. If you cannot fall asleep after 20 minutes, get up and do a relaxing activity until you feel sleepy again, like reading a book, or listening to soothing music.
- Feeling sleepy or tired in the daytime even after getting enough sleep is a sign of poor sleep.
- Keep a sleep schedule, to know your sleep and wake up at times; try to sleep and wake up around the same time daily, even on weekends.

### Some tips for better sleep

**Drink up.** Not alcohol, try warm milk or chamomile tea. There is not much scientific proof that any of these nighttime drinks work to improve your lack of sleep, but there is no harm in trying them.

**Exercise.** Physical activity can improve sleep, though there is not much evidence to support this. Moderate aerobic exercise boosts the amount of nourishing slow wave (deep) sleep. Avoid working out within two hours of bedtime. Aerobic exercise releases endorphins, chemicals that keep people awake. It can also raise core body temperature; this spike signals to the body that it is time to get up and get going.

**Melatonin supplements.** Melatonin is a hormone that helps the body's response to reduced light exposure, which should naturally happen at night. Exposure to unnatural light prevents melatonin release, which can make it hard to fall asleep. Melatonin is available in over-the-counter pill form at most pharmacies. Consistently buy the same brand, since melatonin supplements are unregulated, and the per-pill dosages and ingredients may differ from manufacturer to manufacturer.

**Keep cool.** The ideal temperature is between 65 and 75 degrees Fahrenheit. Keep the room as cool as possible and wear cotton or breathable fabrics to bed.

**Go dark.** If you have the urge to go to the bathroom at night, do not turn on lights, use a flashlight.

As you get older and have more medical issues, sleep position can become positive or negative. Consider these factors before you switch off the light:

- **Back and neck pain:** For people with neck pain, sleeping face up can sometimes make the pain worse. But many people find back sleep is helpful for alleviating low-back pain. If you have soreness in your spine, experiment with various positions and pillows.
- **Snoring:** Snoring may not always be sleep apnea. Sleeping on your side can help diminish snoring. Consult with a health care provider to be sure either way.
- **Reflux and heartburn:** If you suffer from heartburn, sleeping on your right side can make symptoms worse. That is true for people who have gastroesophageal reflux disease and for people who have heartburn for other reasons. Flip to the left side to cool the burn.
- **Appearance:** If you sleep on your side or stomach, you may notice creases on your face when you wake up. Over time, it can lead to breakouts or cause chronic changes to the skin.

Consider other issues for a comfortable night's sleep. Replace old mattresses and pillows. Choose pillows and mattresses that are supportive. If there is neck or shoulder pain, a supportive pillow designed to cradle the neck could be helpful. A bolster or pillow supporting the legs could ease pain in the lower back. Wash sheets frequently and vacuum the mattress to rid it of dust and dander that can cause allergies and impair your sleep. Curtains or blinds keep the room dim/dark at night. Position your bed to avoid distractions such as a desk stacked with work or a blinking light.

Before climbing under the covers and finding a comfortable position, do not forget to do one other important thing: turn off your phone or leave it in the other room. Research shows that late-night use of phones and tablets can interfere with sleep. People who use mobile devices late at night are more depleted the next morning and less engaged at work. People who responded to text messages or other alerts after they had turned in for the night had poorer sleep quality, that in turn predicted symptoms of anxiety and depression.

### **Can too much sleep be bad for your health?**

Sleeping too much can also be a risk for health problems. Sleeping more than eight or nine hours a night, and feeling tired the next day, could indicate a health problem, such as depression, headaches, and other medical conditions. In the general population, sleeping too much was associated with obesity and depression. Too much sleep does not make you sick. It may be that when you are sick it leads you to sleep more and it may be a sign of an existing condition. Either way, if you are always nodding off or taking long naps, it might be time to discuss the issue with your health care provider.

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## The World of Emotions: Keys to Wellbeing and Health in the Second Half of Life

Por María Edith Baca Cabrejos



### Why are emotions important?

#### Emotions, the Driving Force of Life

**Emotions are states of mind that represent the energy that allows us to live, interact** with others, and engage with the world. They are not just reactions; they are mechanisms learned throughout life that play an essential role in physical, mental, and social health.

- **They are a source of life and health:** Positive emotions (joy, love, satisfaction) are the foundation of our wellbeing.
- **They can be harmful:** If we do not learn to manage them. Intense or negative emotions (anger, deep sadness, hostility, frustration) can be toxic or detrimental to our health.

**The art of managing emotions** (recognizing, understanding, expressing, and regulating them) is what we call emotional management. Good management helps create positive relationships and improves health throughout life.

**There are three pillars of emotions.** Emotions are formed by the interaction of three main areas:

1. **The sociocultural field:** How society and culture teach us to feel and react.
2. **The neurobiological field:** What happens in our brain and body with hormones.
3. **The psycho-affective field:** Our personal experiences and how we relate to others (attachment).

### The Importance of Rules (Norms)

An emotional outburst, where we feel there are no limits, often stems from the sense that "the norm," or the rules of right and wrong, have been lost.

- **What is anomie?** It is when social rules (what is ethical, healthy) weaken or disappear.
- **Effect on society:** This weakens social bonds, solidarity, and mutual care within the family, community, or country.

- **The benefit of rules:** Preventing this loss helps shape identity, facilitates emotional management, and strengthens emotional bonds and social cohesion.

## The Brain and the Hormones of Wellbeing (Neurobiology)

Studies based on magnetic resonance imaging (MRIs) have shown that brain development does not end in childhood. Judgment, future planning, impulse control, and the ability to foresee the consequences of our actions finish maturing around the age of 20-21. This maturation process begins around age 20, when gray matter gradually transforms into white matter (myelin). The prefrontal cortex is the last area to complete this crucial myelination process.<sup>1</sup> In addition, the brain produces chemicals called **hormones and neurotransmitters** that are key to how we feel.<sup>2</sup> Here we explain the main ones and how to keep them in balance.<sup>3</sup>

### Hormones of wellbeing and health

Substance	Main Function	How does it stimulate (heal)?
Endorphins	<b>Pleasure and pain relief.</b> They bring euphoria, happiness, and wellbeing.	Laugh aloud. Exercise or walk. Dance, read, meditate, receive hugs.
Serotonin	<b>Wellbeing and concentration.</b> Regulates emotions, sleep, and appetite.	Eat eggs, chicken, dairy products, rice, and legumes. Exercise in the sun.
Oxitocin	<b>The hormone of love and bonding.</b> It increases empathy and trust, and reduces stress/anxiety.	Enjoy gatherings with friends. Give or receive massages and hugs. Laugh daily. Avoid toxic relationships and nurture the good ones.
Dopamine	<b>Reward and motivation.</b> It encourages us to repeat behaviors we enjoy, improves alertness and memory.	Set goals for yourself and achieve them (no matter how small) and celebrate. Eat chocolate, nuts, and blueberries. Get plenty sleep and be grateful.

### Stress and sleep hormones

Substance	Main Function	How does it stimulate (heal)?
Cortisol	<b>Stress hormone.</b> It gives us energy for the day, but in excess it	Use breathing, relaxation, and meditation techniques. Organize your

<sup>1</sup> Oliva, Alfredo. (2007). Desarrollo cerebral y asunción de riesgos durante la adolescencia. Revista: Apuntes de Psicología, Volumen: 25. Fascículo: 3, páginas: 239-254. España.

<sup>2</sup> Gogorza, Rosana. Médica especialista en Geriatria. Fundación OSDE.

<sup>3</sup> Tomás Santa Cecilia. (2022, abril 15). Hormonas del bienestar: cuáles son y cómo nos afectan. Psicología y Mente. <https://psicologiymente.com/neurociencias/hormonas-bienestar>.

	causes anxiety and health problems.	tasks and learn to say NO. Listen to your body and rest.
<b>Adrenalin</b>	<b>Motivation and action.</b> It prepares the body to overcome obstacles. A very low level is associated with depression.	Regulate your cortisol levels (see above). Eat a diet rich in magnesium and vitamins B and C. Avoid stimulants.
<b>Melatonin</b>	<b>Sleep and Wakefulness.</b> Regulates your sleep cycle. Slows cellular ageing.	Get some sun in the morning. Reduce light at night. Establish a sleep routine. Eat a light dinner.

## The value of attachment

Attachment is the way we learn to relate to others from childhood. It determines how we manage our emotions throughout life.<sup>4</sup>

- **Secure attachment:** Those who have a secure attachment (those who have learned to trust and be comforted) have less difficulty regulating their negative emotions and adapt better to stress.
- **Insecure attachment<sup>5 6</sup>:** Insecure attachments (those that are ambivalent, avoidant, and disorganized) make emotional management more difficult and sometimes impossible (disorganized attachment). Furthermore, it produces harmful effects on physical, mental, and social health throughout life.

**Emotional regulation**, in other words, the way we change an emotional state that harms us is an adaptive process that is still being learned.<sup>7</sup>

## Practical steps to manage your emotions<sup>8</sup>

Managing emotions is a continuous learning process. Managing emotions is not about repressing them, but about learning to express them and manage them in ways that benefit us.

### 1. Recognize your emotions

The first step is to **listen to your body and your mind**:

- **Identify the signs:** Pay attention to what your body is telling you: Rapid heart rate? Sweaty palms? Unexplained pain? These are your warning signs.
- **STOP! PAUSE!** Stop when you feel these signs.
- **Give a name to what you are feeling:** Try saying aloud or to yourself, "I am feeling sad," "I am very scared," "This is anger," "I feel frustrated." This helps you get to know yourself better. And getting to know yourself better makes you stronger.

### 2. Seek out the best strategies for you

Once you recognize the emotion, put these strategies into practice:

<sup>4</sup> Bowlby, John. 1969. Una base segura: Aplicaciones de una teoría de apego. Primera edic. Buenos Aires. Traducido por Elsa Mateo. Paidós, 2009.

<sup>5</sup> López, F., Gómez, M., & Fernández, J. (2019). Estudio sobre los estilos de apego y su relación con el desarrollo emocional en la infancia. *Revista de Psicología Infantil*, 35(2), 89-104.

<sup>6</sup> (e.g., Brenning & Braet, 2013; Cabral, Matos, Beyers & Soenens, 2012; Cooper, Shaver & Collins, 1998; Fox & Calkins, 2003; Kerr, Melley, Travea & Pole, 2003; Mikulincer et al., 2003; Pascuzzo, Cyr & Moss, 2013; Waters et al., 2010).

<sup>7</sup> Gross, J. J. (1999). Emotion regulation: Past, present, future. *Cognition and Emotion*, 13(5), 551–573.

<https://doi.org/10.1080/026999399379186>

<sup>8</sup> Adaptado del Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC). 2018. Manual de capacitación para comprender la prevención de la violencia.

- **Talk to yourself:** Ask yourself: What am I feeling? Why do I feel this way? Reflecting helps you to calm down.
- **Breathe deeply:** Incorporate breathing exercises, relaxation, or meditation into your routine. Deep breathing lowers anxiety and cortisol levels (the stress hormone).
- **Distract yourself in a healthy way:** Put your hand under cold water or do anything else that takes your mind off things for a while.
- **Get moving!** Do something active, relaxing, or fun. Physical activity raises the level of feel-good hormones.
- **Set limits!** Explain how you would like others to react to you or support you. Set boundaries about what is unhelpful. Say things like, "I need you to listen to me without interrupting," or "If you don't let me speak, I will shut down and never try again."
- **Use positive phrases:** Repeat phrases that make you feel calm and help you to connect with your strengths, such as: Step by step!, One day at a time!, Tomorrow is another day! I inhale peace, I exhale tension! I let go of rushing and move at my own pace!
- **Find confidants:** Talk to someone you trust. Share your feelings. If you feel you cannot manage your emotions, seek professional help. It is like going to the doctor when something hurts!

**Remember:** Practice these strategies as many times as necessary.  
Thoughts and reflection bring calm.



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