

Pan American Health Organization Conference on Indigenous Health

The first conference ever sponsored by the Pan American Health Organization that focused exclusively on Indigenous peoples health issues was held from April 13 - 18 in Villa Maria, Winnipeg Canada. Forty Indigenous delegates from South, Meso and North America as well as Canadian government and non-governmental representatives attended the Indigenous Peoples & Health Workshop '93 "in hopes of launching a dialogue on the health status of Indigenous peoples."

Presentations, seminars and discussions addressed the gravity of the health crisis in Native communities, covering topics ranging from the dearth of health services and facilities in Native communities, to the significant role of traditional Indigenous medicine, to the ominous Human Genome Development Project. Poverty, oppression and lack of self-determination were seen to be the pri-

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nationally, or in consultation with Indigenous people.

This type of research will have a negative impact on future health programs and projects in Indigenous communities, by undermining Indigenous peoples' trust in the medical and health professions.

Source: Rural Advancement Foundation International

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mary culprits of the alarming health situation confronting Indigenous peoples.

In light of the crisis, a recommendation to declare a state of emergency in specific communities and populations was put forth. Systematic community participation in defining and implementing health policies was regarded as crucial for achieving positive results. The necessity of pursuing ongoing efforts to defend Indigenous lands, improve nutrition and housing, prevent environmental pollution, and legalize Indigenous medicine and practices was discussed at length.

As a result of this conference, a commission of Indigenous delegates, working in conjunction with PAHO to promote Indigenous health issues on local, national and international levels is being established. In addition, an international task force dedicated to ensuring that Indigenous health issues find a place on the agendas of any meetings pertaining to Native peoples is planned, as well as an information network to educate and update Native communities on relevant issues and new developments concerning health.



Delegates to the PAHO conference from left to right: Rosa Baldizón, Maya (Guatemala); Rosa García, Purepecha (México); Carmen Pereira, Mojeña (Bolivia); Yolanda Nahuelcheo, Mapuche (Chile); and Gilberta Batz, Maya (Guatemala)