Alcohol is a major risk factor for mortality and morbidity in the Americas. Overall in the Americas, alcohol consumption levels are higher than the global average while abstention rates for both men and women are consistently lower. In terms of the burden of disease, alcohol caused approximately 323,000 deaths, 6.5 million years of life lost, and 14.6 million disability-adjusted life-years in the region of the Americas, encompassing both acute and chronic disease outcomes from newborns to the elderly in the year 2002. Men have higher levels of all alcohol-attributable burdens of disease compared to women, which can be attributed mainly to their alcohol consumption profile, both in terms of higher total volume and more harmful patterns of drinking, including heavy episodic drinking.

Data from the Multicentric Study on Gender, Alcohol, Culture and Harm, sponsored by PAHO are shown to highlight alcohol consumption profiles and alcohol-related predictors and outcomes for 10 countries in 2005: Argentina, Belize, Brazil, Canada, Costa Rica, Nicaragua, Mexico, Peru, Uruguay and USA. Data from Argentina, Canada, Costa Rica, Mexico, Uruguay and USA were previously collected as part of the international study on Gender, Alcohol and Culture (GENACIS). New data using comparable indicators were collected from Belize, Brazil, Nicaragua and Peru. Wide differences were seen in volume of alcohol consumption and heavy episodic drinking between countries, even those classified in the same WHO sub region. This new survey data highlight the importance of disaggregating sub regional WHO data to the country level in order to see differences in consumption and corresponding risk of alcohol-attributable outcomes at the country level and thus inform country-specific alcohol policies capable of addressing the specific alcohol consumption profiles and problems.