

## PREFACE

This book, written by leading international public health experts from the Pan American Health Organization (PAHO) and its collaborating institutions, demonstrates how research in nutrition and the promotion of active lifestyles has informed action in the development of public policies and in the design, implementation, monitoring, and evaluation of programs.

All of us are the beneficiaries of this science and its applications. Different types of interventions are presented, targeting mothers and children, the economically active population, older adults, and all age groups whose sedentary lifestyle favors the development of noncommunicable diseases such as cardiovascular disorders, diabetes, and various types of cancer.

The collected contributions discuss a broad range of issues. These include actions targeted to individuals, such as those stressing the importance of breast-feeding and the prevention of micronutrient deficiencies, poor nutrition, overweight, and obesity. At the more complex and intersectoral level, the discussion highlights the effect of rapid urbanization on epidemiological profiles, the benefits and limitations of social communication and marketing in encouraging better nutrition and a more active lifestyle, and the role of urban planning and structure in creating healthier behaviors and achieving recommended levels of physical activity. Finally, the book explores the synergistic impact on human health and the quality of urban life that can result from the creation of close partnerships between the public health and urban development sectors, who, together, can increase road safety, reduce urban crime and violence, protect the environment, and preserve public spaces.

From remote rural villages to the world's largest metropolises, *Nutrition and an Active Life: From Knowledge to Action* embraces a diversity of Latin American settings and successful, well-integrated strategies. In each case, the physical, social, cultural, and economic determinants of health, particularly as these relate to nutritional habits and physical activity levels, are described, as well as how the creation of healthy public policies and evidence-based interventions can improve both health status and quality of life at the individual and population levels.

The Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) adopted by the United Nations in 2000 have brought the idea of investing in people's health to the very center of the global development agenda. The health-related MDGs have been established as the critical underpinning for PAHO's technical cooperation efforts over the next decade. The series of research findings presented in *Nutrition and an Active Life: From Knowledge to Action* aim to provide support to the Organization's Member States in the form of effective and practical working tools as these countries strive to bring national health plans and priorities in line with the MDGs.

Five of the eight MDGs receive special attention in this book. They are: MDG-1, dealing with the eradication of extreme poverty and hunger; MDG-4, focusing on the reduction of child mortality; MDG-5, improving maternal health; MDG-7, ensuring environ-

mental sustainability; and MDG-8, forging a global partnership to promote socioeconomic development.

The Millennium Development Goals are important milestones for progress in human development which incorporate relevant indicators of the effectiveness of health systems in addressing key health problems amenable to intervention. By encouraging social participation and increasing health literacy regarding relevant health issues, PAHO seeks to empower a global community to work together in achieving the MDGs. In this sense, *Nutrition and an Active Life: From Knowledge to Action* is an important contribution that should be of particular interest to practitioners and researchers working in health promotion and community education, nutrition, maternal and child health, physical activity, public policy design and planning in health and urban development, and social communications.

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