

Manifesto for Healthy and

Adequate Nutrition

in Latin America and the Caribbean

Healthy nutrition is a universal right recognized since 1948 by the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. However, eating is much more than ingesting nutrients or food. It is a social, cultural, and emotional practice, and even the construction and expression of memories. Eating is, above all, an important part of our health.



Despite advances related to hunger and undernourishment, obesity and other malnutrition problems have increased in recent decades in Latin America and the Caribbean (LAC). More than 50% of the adult population in the region is overweight, and 23% are obese. These individuals are at a much higher risk of developing diabetes, hypertension, cardiovascular diseases, and some types of cancer, which are noncommunicable diseases (NCDs) that are among the leading causes of death in almost every country in the LAC.

There is already a consensus in the international scientific community that the excessive consumption of ultra-processed foods is directly related to weight gain and other NCDs. These products are formulated from unhealthy fats, refined starches, sugars, salt, and additives added to highlight their organoleptic qualities with the sole aim of increasing their sales. In LAC, ultra-processed products are ubiquitous and extensively advertised. In the region, the sales of these products increased by 48% between 2000 and 2013. It is estimated that the sale of ultra-processed products in LAC is close to 129.6 kilos per capita per year.

Ensuring healthier food options for the population is a fundamental step in combating this scenario. However, this does not only mean promoting changes in consumption but also reorienting public policies to create sustainable and nutrition-sensitive food systems that can provide an adequate supply of healthy foods to the entire population.

LAC countries must strengthen and expand their public policies to promote the consumption of healthy foods. This implies, on one hand, discouraging the consumption of ultra-processed foods by regulating their advertising, promoting standardized front-of-pack labeling, and applying specific taxes on sugary drinks and other ultra-processed foods; and, on the other hand, promoting policies aimed at increasing the access, variety, and affordability of healthy foods, such as public procurement systems and their connection with urban and peri-urban agriculture, school feeding programs, and the implementation of short production and marketing circuits, among others.

Furthermore, a profound change in current food systems is necessary to ensure their sustainability and ability to provide nutritious and affordable food for all while preserving ecosystems through more efficient and sustainable use of land and natural resources and improving food production, storage, transformation, and processing techniques.

These challenges require combining efforts and skills not only within a single country but also among countries with similar realities. Latin America has made significant progress in promoting policies to control the consumption of ultra-processed foods, such as the implementation of front-of-pack warning labels in Chile, Peru, Uruguay,

and recently in Mexico; taxes on sugary drinks in Mexico; and food advertising regulations in Chile, among others. However, there are also very interesting examples in terms of promoting healthy eating, with dietary guidelines from Brazil and Uruguay, Brazil's school support programs, and other initiatives. However, our continent also experiences tensions in how to reconcile productive food systems with healthy and sustainable food systems. We also present challenges in not leaving anyone behind in this task, especially women, indigenous populations and other minorities, which makes LAC one of the most unjust regions on the planet. This is why we believe we must work together in this task if we want to achieve concrete progress, and we propose to do so through the formation of the Latin American and Caribbean Nutrition and Health Community of Practice (Colansa).

The mission of Colansa is to contribute to the development of healthy, sustainable, equitable, and inclusive food systems that promote the improvement of nutrition and health of the LAC population through collaborative learning, the generation of scientific knowledge, the exchange of quality information and effective strategies, and support for political advocacy.

**Healthy food systems** are those that enable diverse, balanced, and healthy diets. This requires the participation of different sectors of society, both public and private, such as universities, civil society, public and private institutions, and governments. With varying levels of complexity, all food systems have the capacity to produce the healthy foods necessary for good nutrition and health and that do not cause diseases.

A **sustainable food system** is one that ensures food and nutrition security in such a way that the economic, social, and environmental bases of food security for future generations are not put at risk.

Regarding **food systems that are equitable** in terms of gender, ethnicity, socioeconomic status, and cultural diversity, we consider those that include accessible and transparent arrangements and mechanisms throughout the entire process, from production to food access and consumption.

Finally, an **inclusive food system** is one where all members of society have the opportunity to participate, both as consumers and producers, generating an equitable distribution of benefits.

There are numerous barriers and obstacles that hinder action and the adoption of concrete measures that allow food systems to provide healthier diets and improve food and nutrition security. This includes the lack of recognition of the right to adequate food, the lack of prioritization of pro-nutrition policies on government agendas, power imbalances in food systems, and conflicts of interest with unhealthy food and beverage industries.

The relationship between the food and beverage industry and academic institutions has been widely documented. The results show that industry-sponsored research is susceptible to biases in their favor. The industry has developed several strategies to promote researcher loyalty, such as sponsoring research

related to the products they market, donating to infrastructure, and paying for consultations, among others. Therefore, Colansa associates will not maintain any relationship with the industry that could be considered a conflict of interest, so that Colansa and its actions are free, transparent and focused on the sake of public health.

We will focus our research on knowledge gaps in the effective implementation of evidence-based strategies to improve food systems and eating habits. We will also gather evidence on the effectiveness of feasible interventions in low- and middle-income countries. Additionally, Colansa will contribute to designing effective strategies to achieve the translation of this evidence into concrete actions and achieve broader political advocacy in our region's population.

One aspect of Colansa is to promote proactive interaction between researchers in the fields of action-research and implementation research, and people and organizations working in political advocacy, to increase capacities and knowledge and thus multiply the chances of achieving effective interventions in the fight to improve the quality of food systems in our region. Participatory action-research allows reconnecting the social construction of knowledge and the generation of scientific and social evidence to promote changes in people and social and ecological systems.

To achieve its goals, Colansa will interact with the private and public sectors, universities, civil society, multilateral agencies, and international organizations, institutions, and governments whose work benefits LAC food systems.

Colansa is open to the participation of institutions and individuals who share the community's common domain of interest and are willing to share their perspectives, knowledge, and experiences in an environment of collaborative and practical interaction. Colansa works to achieve common goals as its members learn, share knowledge and experiences, and work to solve common priority problems.

We strive for Colansa to play a leading role in the region as a space for plural, democratic, cooperative, and innovative discussion in the field of healthy nutrition. Let it be a reference area for building common practices and knowledge for all those interested in actively contributing to improving food systems in LAC, contributing to innovation, promoting links between countries, and promoting the transfer of knowledge and skills to solve problems with multidisciplinary approaches.



Community of Practice Latin America and the Caribbean Nutrition and Health

March 2021