“Health is Life” was the slogan for the XIII Binational Health Week (BHW) and the Binational Policy Forum on Migration and Global Health, which were inaugurated on October 1st in Washington DC, at the historical site of the Mexican Cultural Institute. Over 130 people attended the event, including government officials from the United States, Mexico, Guatemala, Honduras, Colombia, Peru, Ecuador, and Bolivia. Members of the U.S.-Mexico Border Health Commission, health professionals, academics, and members of non-governmental organizations actively participated in the Binational Forum, discussing various health issues that affect the Latino population living in the United States, and also exploring opportunities for collaboration. Despite the government shutdown starting that very same day, the event was held with a great turnout.

The opening ceremony was led by Eduardo Medina Mora, Mexico’s Ambassador to the U.S.; Dr. Craig Shapiro, Director of the Office of the Americas in the Office of Global Affairs at the Department of Health and Human Services, representing the Secretary Kathleen Sebelius; and Mr. Rodrigo Reina Liceaga, Head of the Coordinating Unit of Social Engagement in the Mexican Ministry of Health, representing the Secretary Mercedes Juan. Subsequently Julio Ligorría, Guatemala’s Ambassador to the U.S., delivered a message on behalf of Guatemala and the other Latin American countries participating in BHW. Dr. Stefano Bertozzi, Dean of the School of Public Health at the University of California at Berkeley, spoke about the role of the Health Initiative of the Americas as the coordinating entity of multiple efforts to bring health information and services to the Latino community during BHW.

XIII Binational Forum

During the plenary presentations of the Binational Policy Forum on Migration and Global Health Mr. Omar de la Torre, Chief of the Mexican Secretariat of Interior’s Migration Policy, presented the report “Health and Migration: Mexican Immigrants in the United States.” This is the newest report of the series published annually by the National Population Council of Mexico (CONAPO), Mexico’s Migration Policy Unit; the University of California at Berkeley School of Public Health, and the University of California at Los Angeles Center for Health Policy Research.

A very comprehensive presentation with updated information on the perspective of Latin American migration to the United States was conducted by Dr. Doris Meissner, Director of the Immigration Policy Program at the Migration Policy Institute (MPI). Then Ms. Teresa Niño, Director of the Office of Public Engagement at the Centers for Medicare & Medicaid Services, gave a presentation on Health Care Reform in the United States.
and its implications for the Latino population. It should be noted that this presentation was held on the same day that the health insurance markets began their open enrollment, an important part of the U.S. Health Care Reform. To close the section of plenary presentations, Dr. Carlos Humberto Alvarez Lucas, Chief of Staff of the Undersecretary of Prevention and Health Promotion at the Mexican Secretariat of Health, presented a briefing on the comprehensive strategy regarding diabetes that is currently being carried out by the government of Mexico.

**Discussion Groups**

After a lunch provided by the Secretariat of Health of Mexico, participants were divided into three groups to discuss the following issues: Access to Health Services, Infectious Diseases, and Chronic Diseases.

1. **Access to Health Services:**

The first part was devoted to analyzing the issue of people eligible for health care under the Health Care Reform in the United States. Mrs. Jennifer G’Nandu from the National Council of La Raza highlighted the three eligibility mechanisms through which one can obtain health insurance: the employer, government insurance such as Medicaid and Medicare, and the new health insurance market place. She mentioned that there are several opportunities for migrants, but particularly noted that undocumented people have very limited possibilities to obtain health insurance.

This presentation was followed by an interesting and interactive discussion about issues such as binational insurance, medical tourism, the use of telemedicine at a binational level, and of course the work of the Health Stations at Consulates (Ventanillas de Salud).

The second half of the session focused on the population that is not eligible for coverage under the Health Care Reform in the United States. An introduction to the subject was given by Josana Tonda, Coordinator of the Ventanillas de Salud Program, and by Francesca Gany from Immigrant Health and Cancer Disparities Services, an agency that works with the Ventanilla de Salud in New York. The discussion highlighted the objectives and accomplishments of the Second Generation of the Ventanillas de Salud, and the key role they play in health education and medical referrals for the Mexican population living in the U.S.

2. **Infectious Diseases:**

The moderator of the Infectious Diseases working group was Dr. Jeremiah Guzman from the Institute for Mexicans Abroad. Dr. Carlos Magis presented an overview of infectious diseases in Mexico, with an emphasis on HIV/AIDS. He mentioned that in Mexico there are approximately 180,000 people living with HIV who don’t know they are infected. He also commented that migration from Central America to Mexico produces a complicated risk, especially in the area of sex workers. More studies have been done on HIV/AIDS in relation to sex work and migration on the northern border between the United States and Mexico, the results show that the AIDS epidemic in Tijuana has different characteristics to the disease situation of Mexico City.
3. Chronic Diseases:

Maria Teresa Cerqueria, Field Office Chief for PAHO, El Paso, Texas, served as Chair of the Bureau of Chronic Disease. The focus of the roundtable was on obesity and overweight in migrants living in the United States, as well as the prevalence of diabetes and cardiovascular diseases, which are higher among the Mexican population compared to American whites.

Dr. Andrew Moran, Professor of Medicine at Columbia University said that the main factors increasing Mexicans’ propensity to be overweight and obese include: age at the moment of migration, level of education, level of language proficiency, and the social and psychological environment to which they are exposed. Dr. Moran also explained that overweight and obesity are associated with the length of time a migrant has been in the U.S. - the longer the stay in the United States, the more the volume of body mass increases. Successful obesity prevention programs have been based on physical activity interventions for children and adolescents, substituting soda for water or natural juices, reducing salt intake, and reducing the consumption of sugars and fats.

Dr. Simon Barqueira from the National Institute of Public Health of Mexico stressed the importance of the public sector’s responsibility in the prevention of overweight and obesity, highlighting the top 10 actions among which include: promoting physical activity, increasing consumption of fruits and vegetables, and reducing consumption of sugars, saturated fat, and sodium.

Closing

The final celebration of the XIII Binational Health Week inaugurated and the Binational Policy Forum took place at the beautiful facilities of the American Red Cross’s national offices, located across the street from the White House. Participants enjoyed a delicious dinner hosted by the Secretariat of Health of Mexico. During the reception Mr. Harold Brooks, Vice President of International Operations of Red Cross, offered eloquent closing remarks, followed by Dr. Gudelia Rangel, Coordinator of the Comprehensive Strategy for Migrant Health at the Secretariat of Health and Human Services; and Mr. Francisco de la Torre Galindo, Executive Director of the Institute of Mexicans Abroad. Xochitl Castañeda, Director of the Health Initiative of the Americas closed the event addressing the historical opportunities for immigrant families under the U.S. Health Reform.

The inaugural event of the XIII Binational Health Week and the Binational Public Policy Forum on Migration and Global Health were made possible through the efforts and collaboration of the Ministry of Health of Mexico, the Institute for Mexicans Abroad, the Mexican Embassy in Washington, and the Health Initiative of the Americas at the University of California, Berkeley.