

Child and adolescent health programs in Latin America and the Caribbean: a comparative analysis

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The Latin American and Caribbean (LAC) region doubled its per capita income level between 1993 and 2011, and has been successful in reducing both its infant and under five mortality rates by half during that same time period. Nonetheless, differences among countries are extremely wide.

To better understand the factors contributing to these differences, we conducted a comparative analysis of country institutional mechanisms and programs devoted to achieving universal coverage of child and adolescent health services. Specifically, we conducted a comprehensive literature review and analyzed data related to financing, insurance, management and mechanisms of service provision.

Children and adolescents are generally considered a priority group across countries, and various initiatives have been put in place to guarantee their right to health. Nevertheless, the array of programs implemented in the LAC region is very heterogeneous. In some settings, a traditional supply-side structure in the public sector is the main source of care. In others, programs target sub-populations with specific packages of care as a means to guarantee rights and financial incentives (per capita payments, results based financing schemes). An overarching goal of these programs is to identify potential mechanisms for financial protection in order to promote equity.

Various strategies have been implemented in LAC to reach universal health coverage for children and adolescents, based on insurance mechanisms or traditional public health methods. There is no unique model of child and adolescent health coverage in the region. Sometimes different approaches co-exist; often, public and private actors interact, playing different roles as insurers, managers and providers. This study presents these regional experiences, with the aim of contributing to the global debate on health system strengthening towards improved child and adolescent health.