

# *PAHO stresses that the health of Indigenous peoples is a human right*

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**PAHO urged to implement programs that lead to the improvement of the health situation of these groups considered vulnerable?**

Washington, December 11 (RHC)-- The Pan American Health Organization (PAHO) says that access to health services and the protection of Indigenous peoples and other ethnic groups such as Afro-descendants is a fundamental human right.

Commemorating International Human Rights Day on December 10th, the regional health agency deepened in a message on its official Twitter account that achieving this goal is not only a public policy, but also a matter of protection and exercise of human rights.

On a continent with more than 62 million Indigenous people, 617,000 of whom, according to PAHO data, have contracted COVID-19, as a result of which almost 15,000 have died since the beginning of the pandemic due to complications related to this disease.

Regarding the coronavirus, PAHO Director General Dr. Carissa Etienne said that accelerating access to vaccines will be key to protecting populations, particularly the most vulnerable. She called it crucial that "our Indigenous peoples, the elderly and those with existing conditions that leave them at higher risk of contracting the Sars-Cov-2 virus should be first in line to be immunized".

"The arrival of a new variant does not necessarily mean that things will get worse, but it does mean that we need to be more vigilant," the senior official elaborated.

PAHO also highlighted the extreme richness of the Americas in terms of cultural diversity, as expressed in a volume related to ethnicity and human rights, in which it contemplates a series of challenges associated with the recognition and respect for the civil liberties of native peoples, Afro-descendants, Roma and other Indigenous communities.

It also seeks to reduce discriminatory expressions both at the individual level and at the level of social structures suffered by these groups, which hinder their access to health services and the quality of care they receive.

These factors have an impact on their living conditions; therefore, PAHO urges the nations of the region to be concerned about these ethnic inequalities, as well as to implement programs and initiate processes that lead to the improvement of the health situation of these groups, which it considers to be a priority.

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