

Towards a new perspective on oral health, Cariology Education and Public Health in Latin America and the Caribbean

Marcelo BÖNECKER^(a) 
Saul Martins PAIVA^(b) 
Stefania MARTIGNON^(c) 
Ninoska ABREU-PLACERES^(d) 
Fabio Correia SAMPAIO^(e) 
Bernal STEWART^(f) 
Zilson MALHEIROS^(f) 

^(a)Universidade de São Paulo – USP, School of Dentistry, Department of Pediatric Dentistry and Orthodontics, São Paulo, SP, Brazil.

^(b)Universidade Federal de Minas Gerais – UFMG, School of Dentistry, Department of Pediatric Dentistry, Belo Horizonte, MG, Brazil.

^(c)Universidad El Bosque, Caries Research Unit, Research Department, Bogotá, Colombia.

^(d)Universidad Iberoamericana, Biomaterials and Dentistry Research Center, Research and Innovation Department, Santo Domingo, Dominican Republic.

^(e)Universidade Federal da Paraíba – UFPB, Department of Clinical and Community Dentistry, Health Science Center, Joao Pessoa, PB, Brazil.

^(f)Latin American Oral Health Association, LAOHA, São Paulo, SP, Brazil.

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Dental caries disease poses a significant challenge to global public health, particularly in the Latin American and the Caribbean Countries (LACC). Despite the significant progress in understanding as a preventable non-communicable disease,¹ the high prevalence of untreated caries in these regions remains a cause for concern^{2,3} that reflects the social and economic inequalities and inadequate funding for prevention and treatment these countries face.⁴

The situation in the region is aggravated by the high sugar consumption reported in LACC.⁵ According to reports from dentistry opinion leaders on regulating sugar consumption in LACC, there were some public policies that regulated the sale of processed and ultra-processed foods, sometimes supported by guidelines. However, the participants reported a low level of knowledge about the per capita consumption of sugar among the countries. Additionally, the creation of protocols and regulations concerning fluoride use are key factors in the fight against dental caries. While some countries in the region have adopted fluoride use policies, their adoption continues to be challenging. Hence, incorporating oral health into the global agenda is a pivotal step in combatting this disease. Institutions such as the World Health Organization (WHO) and the World Dental Federation (FDI) have proposed concrete measures to ensure universal health coverage in oral health by 2030. Likewise, entities such as the Alliance for a Cavity-Free Future (ACFF) and the Latin American Oral Health Association (LAOHA) are actively collaborating in this direction.

Another crucial aspect is the appropriate education and clinical practice on cariology for the translation of knowledge and understanding of dental caries to key stakeholders. This should lead to the appropriate formulation of public policies positively impacting the population. In recent years, there has been a marked global transition in cariology education, moving from a predominantly restorative focus to an emphasis on prevention and oral health promotion. From this new perspective, dental caries is viewed as a controllable disease through patient-centered management, risk-based approaches, and a focus on long-term oral health throughout all life cycles. Notably, the European Core Curriculum in Cariology has served as an inspiration in this change, inspiring LACC countries to adapt similar structures.

Now the primary goal is to establish a basic curricular framework in cariology for Spanish-speaking and for Portuguese-speaking (Brazilian) dental schools in Latin America. This should address not only dental

caries education but also encourage discussions so that professionals can contribute to the development of policies on fluoride use and sugar consumption. In summary, respecting the differences and priorities of each country, there is a need for the implementation of policies across the region, promoting research collaboration. Indeed, knowledge exchange among countries is essential for achieving progress in this area and effectively addressing dental caries.

Aware of the aforementioned, since 2020, the Latin American Oral Health Association (LAOHA) has driven various initiatives to improve the dental caries situation in LACC. A significant example is the inclusion of three actions being promoted with the participation of experts in various areas of cariology throughout the region. This publication is a result of the work done by LAOHA by means of these three initiatives. Action 1, policies for the use of fluoride and reduction of sugar consumption in Latin American and the Caribbean countries;⁶ Action 2, the development and consensus of a cariology core curriculum framework for dental schools for Spanish-speaking Latin American countries;⁷ and Action 3, includes this consensus for dental schools in Brazil.⁸ These initiatives have been shaped by different teams and work groups, in which regional experts and various associations and organizations actively participated to achieve the proposed goals.

Each of these initiatives described has been explored in different articles presented in this edition.

Furthermore, these actions are annually highlighted in the “Call for Action”, an event prepared by LAOHA during the World Cavity-Free Future Day in October. Furthermore, results have been shared at conferences and events such as the meeting of the Organization of Faculties and Schools of Dentistry (OFEDO-UDUAL) in Punta Cana in 2022; the European Organisation for Caries Research (ORCA) in Egmond aan Zee, Netherlands; and at the combined General Session of the International Association for Dental Research and Latin American IADR Region Session (IADR/IADR-LAR) in Bogotá, Colombia, both in 2023. Specifically, during this IADR/LAR meeting in Bogotá, these actions were presented within the symposium titled: Consensus on Dental Caries and Periodontal Disease in Latin America: Combined Strategies. This event featured prominent cariology and periodontology experts from the region, making it significantly relevant in showcasing the actions being pursued at the regional level.

In conclusion, the ongoing effort to reduce dental caries in the region, in collaboration with various institutions and organizations illustrated in Table, aligns with LAOHA’s mission and goals for the benefit of Latin America and the Caribbean. Undoubtedly, this work lays the foundation for future initiatives, not only focused on reducing dental caries but also on developing public policies and optimizing education on this condition in LACC.

Table. Organizations/Associations that support the Call for Action and/or its respective initiatives.

Organization	Country/Region
International Association of Pediatric Dentistry (IAPD)	International
European Organisation for Caries Research (ORCA) - Education Platform	International
World Dental Federation (FDI)	International
Alliance for a Cavity-Free Future (ACFF)	International
Latin America Regional Organization of the World Dental Federation FDI (LARO)	Latin America
Latin American Dental Federation (FOLA)	Latin America
International Association for Dental Research (IADR/LAR) - Caries Group and Elderly Group/GLIOG	Latin America
Latin American Oral Health Association (LAOHA) - Cariology Group	Latin America
Caribbean Oral Health Initiative (COHI)	Caribbean
Ibero-American Observatory of Public Policies in Oral Health	Latin America

Continue

Continuation

OFEDO/UDUAL (Organization of Faculties and Schools of Dentistry)	Latin America
Ibero-American Federation of Periodontology (FIPP)	Latin America
Latin American Association of Operative Dentistry and Biomaterials (ALODYB)	Latin America
Academy of Cariology of Chile	Chile
American Academy of Cariology (AAC)	The United States
Argentine Dental Association (AOA)	Argentina
Argentine Society of Periodontics (SAP)	Argentina
Bolivian College of Dentists	Bolivia
Brazilian Association of Collective Health (ABRASCO)	Brazil
Brazilian Association of Dental Education (ABENO)	Brazil
Brazilian Dental Association (ABO)	Brazil
Brazilian Dentistry Teachers Group (GBPD)	Brazil
Brazilian Group of Teachers of Orthodontics and Pediatric Dentistry (GBPOO)	Brazil
Brazilian Society of Periodontics and Implantology (SOBRAPI)	Brazil
Center for Epidemiology and Surveillance of Oral Diseases (CEVEO)	Chile
Chilean Society of Odontogeriatrics	Chile
College of Dental Surgeons of Costa Rica	Costa Rica
Colombian Academy of Aesthetic Operative Dentistry and Biomaterials (ACODEB)	Colombia
Colombian Academy of Prosthodontics (ACP)	Colombia
Colombian Association of Dental Faculties (ACFO)	Colombia
Colombian Dental Federation (FOC)	Colombia
Conselho Federal de Odontologia (CFO)	Brazil
International Association for Dental Research - Brazilian Division (SBPqO)	Brazil
Mexican Federation of Dental Schools and Colleges (FMFEO)	Mexico
National Society of Researchers in Dentistry (SNIO)	Mexico
North-Northeast Society for Dental Research (SNNPqO)	Brazil
São Paulo Association of Dental Surgeons (APCD)	Brazil
UNICA - Caries Research Unit, El Bosque University	Colombia
Uruguayan Society of Pediatric Dentistry (SUOP)	Uruguay
Uruguayan Dental Association (AOU)	Uruguay
Venezuelan Society of Dental Surgery, Aesthetics and Biomaterials	Venezuela
Colgate-Palmolive	International

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