

CASE STUDY

Implementation of the Minamata Convention by the health sector in Brazil

Brazil

The Sectorial Plan for the Implementation of the Minamata Convention is an initiative of the Brazilian health sector with the purpose of reducing mercury exposure impacts on human health in the country.

Goals and Objectives

The strategies contained in the Sectorial Plan were built and will be implemented jointly by all its stakeholders, in order to expand and strengthen institutional and technical capacities for the identification, diagnosis, treatment and monitoring of vulnerable populations; and to reduce and eliminate risks to human health from exposure to mercury and its products. Another goal is to develop a research agenda and expand the knowledge of the population and health professionals about the risks of mercury exposure, so that they are also an active part of the process of improving the proper management of this contaminant in the national territory.



Project Overview

Context

Brazil played an active role in the negotiations for the Minamata Convention, which was signed by the country in 2013, internalized through Legislative Decree No. 99 and regulated by Presidential Decree No. 9,470 of 14 August 2018.

Reinforcing its commitment through the development and implementation of public health strategies aimed at reducing the health impacts of populations and workers exposed and potentially exposed to mercury and its compounds, the Ministry of Health of Brazil coordinated the development of the Sectorial Plan for the Implementation of the Minamata Convention on Mercury.

Approach

The Sectorial Plan was developed by a Health Sector Working Group established by Ordinance GM/MS No. 2,197 of 20 July 2018.

The Working Group involved with development of the Sectorial Plan for the Implementation of the Minamata Convention on Mercury includes representatives from various institutions in the health sector, from all secretariats of the Ministry of Health, and from academia and representatives of civil society.

The group has met 10 times since 2018. The meetings were initially held in person; however, with the advent of the coronavirus disease (COVID-19) pandemic, the meetings became virtual and – in order to better articulate and manage the execution of the actions in this new format – the group was divided into three discussion subgroups focusing on research, continuing education, and compulsory notification of mercury poisoning.



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Approach

From the moment of its establishment, the Working Group developed the Sectorial Plan, which consists of 29 strategies to be executed, distributed into six guiding axes:

Axis 1 – Measures to strengthen the normative framework and institutional capacity to contribute to the implementation process of the Minamata Convention on Mercury.

Axis 2 – Management of equipment stocks, supplies and activities that contain or use mercury.

Axis 3 – Measures for dissemination of information and public awareness.

Axis 4 – Measures of care, surveillance and health promotion of populations exposed and potentially exposed to mercury.

Axis 5 – Development of international cooperation for implementation of the Minamata Convention on Mercury in the health sector.

Axis 6 – Development of research related to the effects of mercury on health and the environment.

Results

Among the 29 proposed actions, nine have already been completed, with emphasis on the publication of two regulations that: (i) prohibit the manufacture, commercialization and use of thermometers and sphygmomanometers containing mercury in all health establishments; and (ii) prohibit the use of dental amalgamation in unencapsulated form. Also highlighted are the publication of guidelines to states and municipalities regarding the storage of mercury-containing health equipment, and a study on the safety of dental amalgam. The Sectorial Plan is available on the website of the Ministry of Health (http://bvsmms.saude.gov.br/bvs/publicacoes/plano_convencao_minamata_mercurio_2020.pdf).

Lessons Learned

Lessons learned throughout the process of drawing up the Sectorial Plan for the Implementation of the Minamata Convention confirm that it is important to maintain a well-defined plan and agendas of the meetings, cooperate with different stakeholders and delegate the responsibilities of each member of the group well.

Even though it is a health sector plan, it is essential that there is integration between the most diverse sectors (such as the environment, private sector, mining and other sectors) involved with the implementation of the Minamata Convention at the national level. Faced with such a heterogeneous scenario of exposure to mercury in Brazil, the identification of vulnerable populations is important for the health needs assessment and the development of local public policies. The importance of integration between academic research and the service provided by public health agencies is also significant.

As with other challenges that appeared with the pandemic, it is important to consider unexpected circumstances that may arise when planning the work so as to avoid as much as possible delays in taking or finalizing different actions.

The case study was authored by the Ministry of Health. The named authors alone are responsible for the views expressed in this publication.

Recommendations

With the experience gained from the development of the Sectorial Plan, it is recommended that:

- *The work carried out is articulated with the various institutions involved in the mercury agenda; and*
- *The project has well-defined sources of funding for execution of the proposed actions.*



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