

122nd Session  
Washington, D.C.  
June 1998

*Provisional Agenda Item 4.11*

CE122/17 (Eng.)  
15 April 1998  
ORIGINAL: ENGLISH

### **PAHO PUBLICATIONS PROGRAM**

The Pan American Health Organization has been publishing scientific and technical texts since 1922, in line with the Member States' founding compact to share health information for the collective good. Currently, the Publications Program issues a multilingual, peer-reviewed monthly journal, *Revista Panamericana de Salud Pública/Pan American Journal of Public Health*, and manages the production of titles in numerous series—Official Documents, Scientific Publications, Technical Papers, and the Communicating for Health series.

With the intent of providing the hemispheric health constituency validated, relevant, timely information at the lowest cost, the Secretariat has, in recent years, undertaken numerous initiatives. Among those are electronic publishing on diskette, CD-ROM, and the Internet; development of a comprehensive full-text institutional memory database; and marketing of PAHO publications to foster greater awareness of the Organization as a major source of public health information as well as to assure a return on its publishing investment—thereby reducing the burden of publications on the regular budget.

This topic was reviewed by the Subcommittee for Planning and Programming and is now presented to the Executive Committee for its review and comments.

## CONTENTS

|  | <i>Page</i> |
|--|-------------|
| Executive Summary .....                                      | 3           |
| 1. Introduction.....   | 4           |
| 2. Background.....   | 4           |
| 3. Content and Form.....                                     | 6           |
| 3.1 Journals.....  | 6           |
| 3.2 Books.....   | 8           |
| 4. Structure for the Present, Strategies for the Future..... | 9           |
| 4.1 Institutional Memory .....                               | 10          |
| 4.2 Electronic Communications.....                           | 10          |
| 4.3 Marketing.....   | 12          |
| 5. Conclusion .....  | 14          |

## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The Pan American Health Organization has been publishing scientific and technical texts since 1922, in line with the Member States' founding compact to share information for the collective good. Over that period, PAHO's publications have reflected the topics of contemporary concern to the countries and the Region—initially dealing primarily with infectious diseases and today covering the gamut of strategic and programmatic orientations adopted by the Governing Bodies.

Currently, PAHO's Publications Program issues a multilingual, peer-reviewed monthly journal, *Revista Panamericana de Salud Pública/Pan American Journal of Public Health*, and manages the production of titles in numerous series—Official Documents, Scientific Publications, Technical Papers, and the Communicating for Health series. All material published by the Program is first submitted to peer review: articles for the *Revista/Journal* are reviewed by three peers from a panel of 850 experts in the various fields of public health that is administered by the Program, and manuscripts submitted for issuance in the book series are considered by the PAHO Publications Committee. That Committee, established in 1995, prepared a publications policy that was subsequently reviewed by all PAHO senior managers and then approved by the Director in 1996; the policy applies to all texts published by the Organization, including Country Offices, Centers, and technical programs.

With the intent of providing the hemispheric health constituency validated, relevant, timely information at the lowest cost, the Secretariat has, in recent years, undertaken numerous initiatives. Among those initiatives are electronic publishing—on diskette, CD-ROM, and the Internet—which has enabled the Organization to take advantage of cost savings afforded by the new technology, to extend its reach and broaden its audience, and to create more user-friendly means of accessing its work and providing a forum for interactive exchanges. Another project has entailed the development of a comprehensive full-text institutional memory database that will gather and organize all documents prepared by the Secretariat and disseminate them via the Intranet and, selectively, the Internet. Yet another initiative was the institution of a marketing program that targets the discernment of, and response to, constituent needs; assessment of the effectiveness of PAHO's products and services; and a return on the Organization's investment in publishing. Among the results of the marketing program over the past five years are a 38% decline in distribution costs and a tripling of sales revenues.

*Information is the most powerful instrument in today's world for effecting changes at the national, community, and individual levels. It can relieve much of the pain and suffering derived from ignorance. We in the Pan American Health Organization will traffic in information. It is our stock in trade.*

—Sir George Alleyne, September 1994

## **1. Introduction**

One of the main objectives of the Pan American Health Organization is the dissemination of scientific and technical information related to health in the Americas. Toward that end, the Publications Program, in collaboration with experts, seeks and selects relevant material; applies rigorous professional standards of editing, production, and design; and ensures timely distribution of that information—in conventional print and, increasingly, in electronic forms—throughout the Americas and beyond. The Organization's publications cover topics related to its strategic and programmatic orientations, with the aim of empowering decision-makers, health workers, and the community at large to understand prevailing health conditions and to address people's health needs. The Program regularly assesses the impact of its products and services; findings from those assessments are made public record (e.g., *Boletín de la Oficina Sanitaria Panamericana* 119 (6), 1995 and 121 (2), 1996; *Bulletin of the Pan American Health Organization* 30 (2), 1996), and they are used to inform the direction of PAHO publishing.

## **2. Background**

It was the need to disseminate information, in fact, that led to the establishment of the Pan American Sanitary Bureau. As the American governments became increasingly concerned about the need to collaborate on a wide range of social, economic, and political issues, the First International Conference of American States, held in Washington, D.C., in 1890, established the agency known today as the Organization of American States. That body, at its Second Conference in Mexico City in 1901, called for a “general convention of representatives of the health organizations of the different American republics” to formulate “sanitary agreements and regulations” and to “designate a permanent executive board” to be known as the International Sanitary Bureau—the precursor of the Pan American Sanitary Bureau. The Bureau was to have among its first cited duties that of urging “each Republic to promptly and regularly transmit . . . all data of every character relative to the sanitary conditions of their respective ports and territories.”

It was not, however, until some years after World War I that the Bureau began to develop as an entity with a definitive program and budget, albeit the latter of minor measure. The Sanitary Conference in 1920 charged the Bureau with publishing a

monthly bulletin (“Boletín Internacional de las Repúblicas Americanas”). Two years later, in 1922, the *Boletín de la Oficina Sanitaria Panamericana* presented its first issue—with subsequent issues appearing every month, without fail, ever since—making the *Boletín* and its successor, the *Revista Panamericana de Salud Pública/Pan American Journal of Public Health*, the oldest ongoing international public health journal in the world.

In keeping with the Bureau’s quintessential role as clearinghouse of health information, in 1924 its Director began publishing annual summaries of the Region’s known health conditions. His information derived from means of communication that in this “age of the chip” might seem primitive: John D. Long, the Sanitary Bureau’s first “traveling representative,” crisscrossed the Americas in the 1920s and 1930s, cabling health-related information of vital importance back to Washington so that the Bureau could in turn cable it to the collective countries. In 1926, the Director informed the Member States of the Bureau’s efforts to set up a statistical service and promote the naming of epidemiological assistants in the countries, so that they could collaborate with that service. “It is my hope that all the countries submit to the Pan American Sanitary Bureau reports on diseases and mortality and that those reports be broad and detailed so as to be of real worth to the activities of the Bureau.” He noted subsequently, in his report for 1929, improvements in the reporting of information:

A telegraphic code was devised, printed, and distributed to all the Directors of Health. Monthly and sometimes weekly cables have been received reporting the presence of quarantinable diseases and the means to prevent their spread through international trade. When these cables have been sufficiently important, they have been transmitted immediately to the Directors of Health of the countries most directly interested. The information has also been transmitted by cable to the Office International d’Hygiène Publique and to the Health Section of the League of Nations.

Books began to appear about this time as well, with the first titles, like the Bureau itself, dealing largely with infectious diseases. By the 1960s both the institution and its publishing arm were casting a wider net, and books covered an array of subjects: vaccines, dentistry, mental health, hospital services, nutrition, water supply, and sanitation.

Over three quarters of a century, the mission and scope of the Publications Program have grown in tandem with those of the Organization and today encompass a vast range of health and social development issues. In the course of that time, PAHO has gained a well-deserved reputation in the field of health information, and its publications have had direct influence over the course of public health in the Americas (see PAHO, *Pro Salute Novi Mundi*, pp. 118-126). It was said of the *Boletín de la Oficina Sanitaria*, in its May 1952 issue, that it “has collected and brought together ideas and knowledge about health in a single body of information that has helped unite health workers

throughout the hemisphere—regardless of the distances separating them—for a common purpose.” Much the same could be said of PAHO publishing.

### 3. Content and Form

PAHO uses publishing as the most formal means of communicating among its collaborators and constituencies. Publication implies commitment—of institutional prestige and endorsement as well as of the precious resources of people, money, and time. Obviously, no publisher can publish everything, so the decision to publish is a form of gatekeeping—choosing what information, among infinite possibilities, will reach the public. Decisions as to what the Publications Program will publish under PAHO’s imprimatur result from careful acquisition and peer review in light of the Organization’s strategic and programmatic orientations: health in human development, health systems and services, health promotion and protection, environmental health, and disease prevention and control.

#### 3.1 Journals

As mentioned previously, the Bureau’s monthly *Boletín de la Oficina Sanitaria Panamericana* published its maiden issue in 1922. The *Bulletin of the Pan American Health Organization* commenced in 1966 as an annual publication and beginning in 1973 was issued quarterly. In 1997 the Organization transformed those two journals into one multilingual, peer-reviewed monthly, the *Revista Panamericana de Salud Pública/Pan American Journal of Public Health*. The aim was to produce better quality information at reduced costs. In effect, whereas the trend among other scientific journals has been toward ever greater specialization—with the narrow focus, lower readerships, and higher costs that ensue—PAHO’s fusion of its journals has allowed greater selectivity, broader focus, larger readerships, and a 32% reduction in production and distribution costs.

Authors throughout the world, but primarily from the countries of the Region, submit original research papers to the *Revista Panamericana de Salud Pública/Pan American Journal of Public Health*. Senior editors screen those papers on the basis of the validity of their content and its relevance to public health in the Americas; those that meet these criteria are then sent to three peer reviewers (from a list of 850 experts maintained by the Program); and, on the basis of their recommendations, articles are rejected or accepted. A streamlining of operations and the computerization of the peer review process have enabled the Program to reduce article turn-around time—i.e., from receipt to publication—to under one year. The *Journal* has been published on time without interruption every month since May 1922.

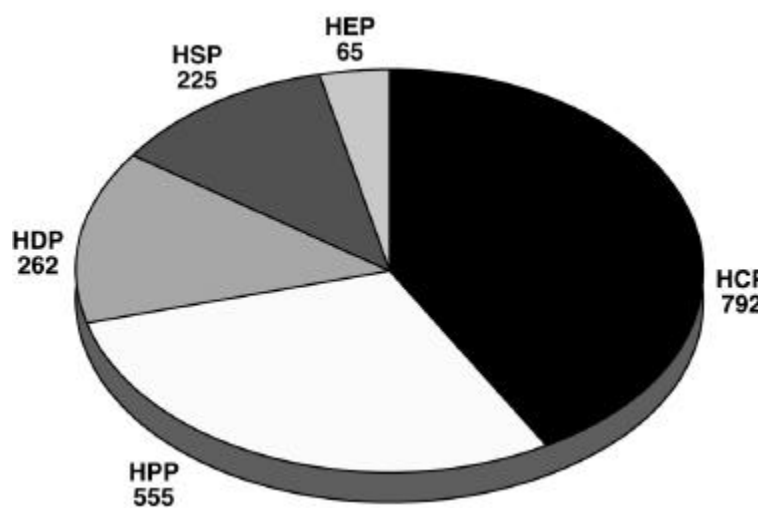
Figure 1 shows the distribution of articles published in the *Boletín*, the *Bulletin*, and the *Revista* in 1996 and 1997 according to the Organization’s five strategic and

programmatic orientations: health and human development (abbreviated as HDP), health services and systems (HSP), disease prevention and control (HCP), health promotion (HPP), and environmental health (HEP).

**Figure 1**

**PAHO Journal Publishing:  
An Investment in Technical Cooperation**

**(Articles published in PAHO's flagship periodicals 1996-1997)**



**Total number of article pages published: 1,899**

Over the years the *Journal* has kept pace with the unprecedented evolution of knowledge and applications in the health sciences, from the development of new antibiotics and vaccines to advances in biotechnology. As a depository and a tool for the communication of information, and through its support for scientific research, the *Journal* makes an important contribution to the development of public health in the Western Hemisphere. As the voice of the Organization, it guides the Member States in the application of collectively approved health policies and activities. Above all, it helps nurture thinking about public health and cooperation among countries in the Americas. In the issues and volumes to come, the *Journal* will continue to reflect the forward-looking concerns of those who have devoted their lives to the fight against poverty and disease.

### 3.2 Books

As explained earlier, since the 1920s PAHO has been issuing official documents and scientific publications on topics that have reflected the evolving concerns of the Organization and the countries. In the 1980s the management of information came to be considered the keystone to transforming health systems, so the Organization intensified stimulation of the cycle of production, collection, critical analysis, and application of information. At the same time, PAHO began to focus on “social communication”—providing health information to the mass media, schools, and community forums, and through them to the public at large. Two new series were launched: the Technical Papers, which enabled the Organization to take advantage of emerging desktop publishing technologies to publish information rapidly and economically, and the Communicating for Health series, which addressed the lay reader and aimed to create an informed public.

Book manuscripts are either sought directly by the Publications Program to fill perceived information needs or submitted to the Program by the technical divisions; are reviewed by the Publications Committee; and, if recommended by the Committee, approved (or not) by the Director. To date, the Program has issued 626 scientific and technical titles—many of them in both Spanish and English, and occasionally Portuguese and French—on every aspect of public health in the Americas. Seen as an optimal means of making known experiences and advances occurring in the field, PAHO publishing has gained momentum in recent years and has come to be seen as an essential component of technical cooperation with the countries. Today, the Organization distributes more than 300,000 copies of PAHO publications annually.

Figure 2 shows the distribution of work published since 1985, according to the five strategic and programmatic orientations.

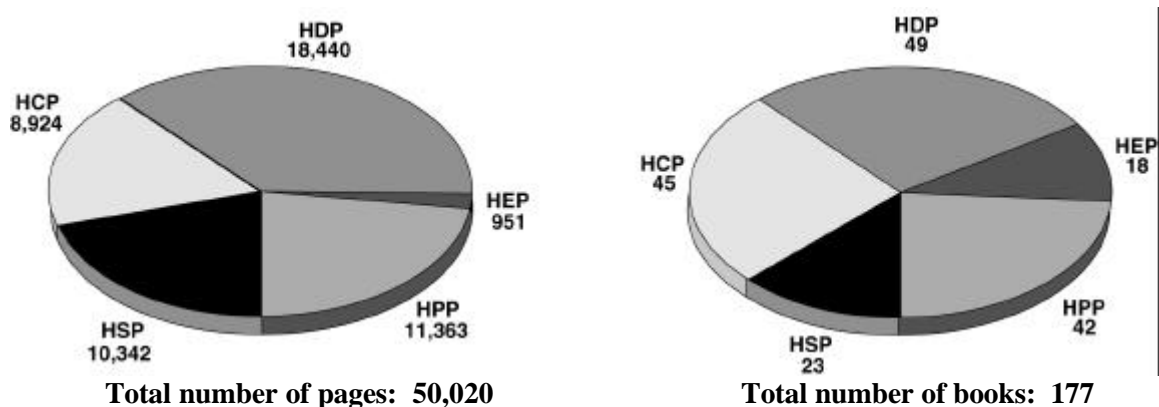
Included among best-selling titles issued over that period are texts wholly authored by PAHO staff: three editions of *Health Conditions in the Americas* and an edition and several reprints of *Zoonoses and Diseases Communicable between Man and Animals*. At the same time, many of PAHO’s most successful books have been copublications, the result of other agencies’ interest in partnering with PAHO to produce top-quality works—including, among others, three editions of *Manual de control de las enfermedades transmisibles*, with the American Public Health Association; two editions of *Cómo escribir y publicar trabajos científicos*, with Oryx Press; *Oncología clínica*, with the American Cancer Society; two editions of *Conocimientos actuales sobre nutrición*, with the International Life Sciences Institute; *Los doce que sobreviven*, with UNICEF; and *Midlife and Older Women in Latin America and the Caribbean*, with the American Association of Retired Persons. Some of the publications have been particularly timely, among them books on the eradication of poliomyelitis and on the prevention and control of dengue and dengue hemorrhagic fever.



Figure 2

**PAHO Book Publishing:  
an Investment in Technical Cooperation**

(Books published by the Publications Program and in press, 1985-1998)

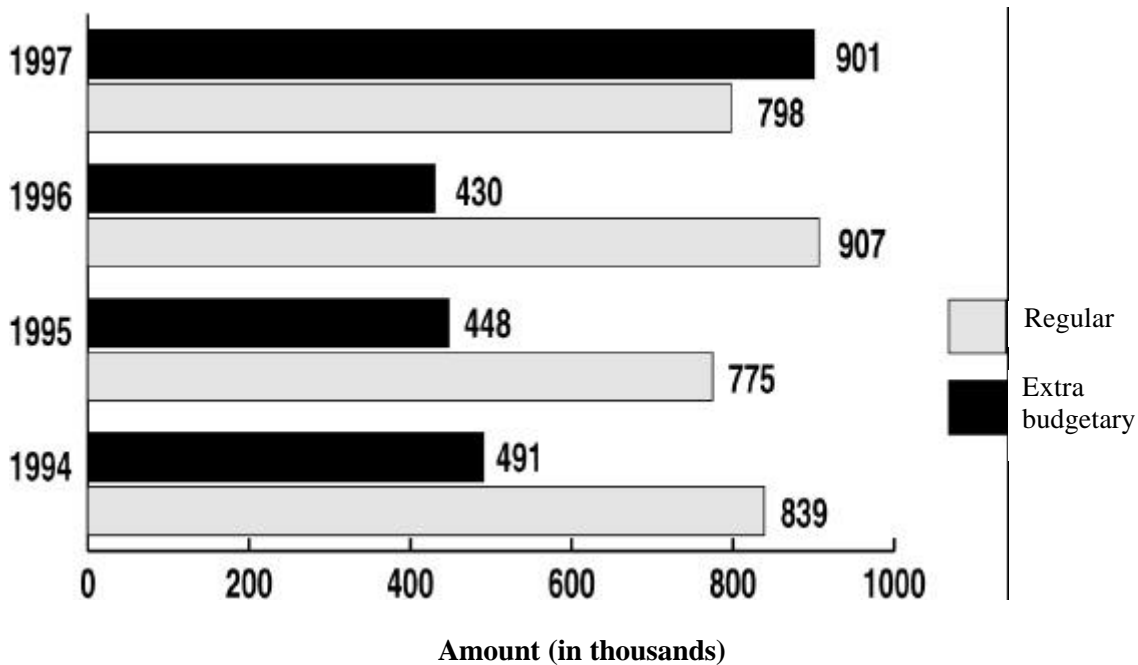


The 1990s have witnessed the Organization's entry into the digital age as PAHO has begun issuing electronic publications: the *Clasificación Internacional de Enfermedades—10a Revisión* on diskettes and soon in a multilingual CD-ROM; *Health Conditions in the Americas/Condiciones de salud en las Américas* and *Health Statistics from the Americas/Estadísticas de salud de las Américas* on CD-ROM; *Biodiversity, Biotechnology, and Sustainable Development* with combined portions of print and diskette material; and, among other publications, the full-text versions of *Strategic and Programmatic Orientations/Orientaciones estratégicas y programáticas* and the *Annual Report of the Director/Informe anual del Director, 1996* on the PAHO Web site.

**4. Structure for the Present, Strategies for the Future**

The Publications Program comprises the Editorial Service; Electronic Communications; Marketing, Distribution, and Sales; and the Information and Documentation Service (Headquarters Library). Program funds for 1994–1997 are shown in Figure 3. Despite an increase in both projects (e.g., Electronic Communications in 1995) and productivity (measured in printed pages and types of products), the regular budget has not increased, and actually decreased last year. The Program has been able to reduce the load on the regular budget by instituting efficiency measures, attracting the influx of extrabudgetary funds from entities interested in copublishing with PAHO, and generating sales revenues. A description of some of the more important new strategies underway follows.

**Figure 3**  
**Funding of the Publications Program, 1994-1997**



#### **4.1 Institutional Memory**

In addition to published texts, the Publications Program has responsibility for the Headquarters Library, which is overseeing development of a computerized full-text institutional memory project, the aim of which is to manage all PAHO documentation—that is, to gather, organize, preserve, retrieve, and disseminate it—as a tool for enhancing Bureau staff’s technical cooperation with the countries. The system will allow rapid, low-cost, and standardized preparation and distribution of technical reports, project reports, meeting proceedings, newsletters and other periodicals, serial documents, for-sale publications, and PAHO translations of WHO documents. All but confidential texts will also be available over the Internet via the PAHO Web site.

#### **4.2 Electronic Communications**

Print publishing has proved its value over time and can be expected to thrive well into the foreseeable future. It has, notwithstanding, major drawbacks: it can be costly and slow, and its reach limited. Recently, Sir George Alleyne noted that:

Information will be the basis for the coordination that is necessary in the international health world. It will be the foundation for the networks that institutions must create globally. It will inform the decisions to be taken nationally and locally. It will be the tool for inducing the behavior change that must take place at the level of nations and of their people. Rapid dissemination of information through the new technologies will, I hope, foster a global spirit by removing the need for physical proximity that is one of the bases for the persistence of closed societies and disengaged nations.

- National Council of International Health Monthly Seminar Series 18, August 1997

In effect, PAHO has been taking full advantage of the new technologies—electronic mail, listservs, gopher, file transfer protocol, telnet, and the World Wide Web—to facilitate equitable access to information.

The Organization launched its Web site in September 1995, doing so for a number of reasons: (1) to create a forum to mediate between the institution and its constituency—a many-to-many mode of communication in lieu of the erstwhile one-to-many dissemination; (2) to extend the reach of its information; (3) to facilitate both updating of its information and access to it; (4) to lower production and distribution costs; and (5) to promote PAHO's products and services. Despite all the hype, the Internet is simply a means of producing, publishing, and distributing information. Nevertheless, it is changing the way one works and communicates in very fundamental ways. Electronic publishing is enabling PAHO's readers to become more active, is redefining the scientific inquiries and technical communications PAHO manages, and is making primary materials accessible to ever broader audiences.

Recognizably, not all those who might be interested in the Organization's information have access to the Internet, but that situation is changing. Network domain survey results (January 1998) show that there were approximately 30,000,000 hosts connected to the Internet worldwide; an estimated average five users per host, or almost 150 million people; and 258,000 hosts, with an estimated 1,290,000 users, active in 37 countries and territories in Latin America and the Caribbean. The developing countries of the Region are playing leapfrog, skipping stages of technological development by installing the latest telecommunications equipment. The Inter-American Development Bank recently announced that it is earmarking funds to help finance development of the information infrastructure, "so that it comes within the reach of the poor, rural populations, and indigenous groups." (Enrique Iglesias, IDB President, at the Informatics 2000 Conference, September 1997)

There is no guarantee that the Internet will make the international health community any wiser. It is, after all, just a network of computer networks. Notwithstanding, with the push-shove ongoing between development of the technology and demands of the consumer, one day the Internet may become an all-encompassing repository of human knowledge. For now, it serves as a means of leveraging the

Organization's intellectual capital, of displaying the information it develops—its mission, its unique expertise and core competencies, its policies, programs, services, and products—and, at a low cost, of communicating information to large audiences in the farthest corners of the Americas, almost instantaneously.

### **4.3 Marketing**

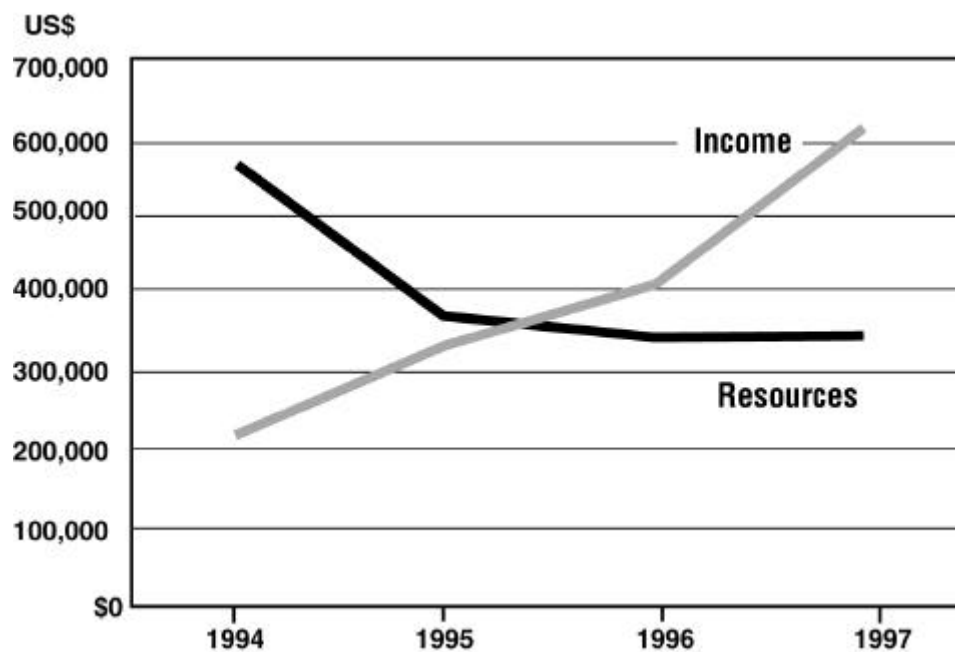
Five years ago, in light of the Organization's significant investment in publishing but inadequate dissemination of its published products, the Director decided to outsource the distribution function and commence a marketing program. As a result, Bureau regular budget resources for this activity dropped by 38% after 1993 and revenues tripled. Figure 4 shows all expenses and income for 1994-1997. Two-thirds of the Marketing, Distribution, and Sales operation is now funded by earnings from the sale of publications.

In addition, the application of marketing principles has made it possible for the Program to clearly define its niche in scientific and technical publishing, to assess its strengths and weaknesses, to determine the market's/beneficiaries'/targets' scientific and technical information needs and demands, to understand and manage the value added in PAHO publishing, and to work toward a return on that added value. Marketing has enabled us to better evaluate what we publish and for whom. And, fusing the aims of marketing with the capabilities of electronic communication, PAHO has reached larger audiences ever farther afield, selling books in the past year to consumers in the new PAHO markets of Afghanistan, Australia, Cambodia, Hong Kong, Indonesia, Kenya, Malaysia, Morocco, New Zealand, and Thailand.

As part of the marketing process, the Program conducts research on the impact of PAHO publications applying, among other measurements, the analysis of citations in the health literature, growth in the number of reproduction and translation rights for PAHO publications, sales increases, greater demand for PAHO publications in information and documentation services throughout Latin America and the Caribbean (according to library subscriptions and purchases as well as surveys of the PAHO Publications Centers), book reviews, and the inclusion of PAHO texts in university course requirements. Among other results from these efforts are over \$1 million in sales in the past biennium, a tripling of paid subscriptions last year, and the finding that among major health journals in Latin America and the Caribbean the *Boletín* was, by far, the most cited in the literature over the period studied (1985-1992).

Figure 4

**Regular Fund Resources Assigned to and Sales Income Generated by the Marketing, Distribution, and Sales Unit, 1994-1997**



The Organization holds the copyright for titles issued by the Publications Program. It is worth noting that monumental energy and investment go into the elaboration of a publication—identification of a need, intellectual design, research, writing, and then all the editorial, production, and distribution efforts. Copyright is the means by which the Organization manages the dual identity of information as a proprietary commodity to be bought and sold and as a public good to be freely shared. It assures that PAHO will gain recognition and reward, in the form of sales revenues, for its work. Revenues, in turn, enable the Organization to expand its publishing efforts: the \$1 million in sales over the last biennium financed all promotional activities as well as the publishing or reprinting of *Cómo estudiar un estudio y probar una prueba*; *La salud del adolescente y el joven*; *Clasificación Internacional de Enfermedades—10a Revisión*; *Zoonosis y enfermedades transmisibles comunes al hombre y los animales*; *Epidemiología básica*; *Género, mujer y salud en las Américas*; *Dengue y dengue hemorrágico en las Américas: guías para su prevención y control*; and *Internet, Telematics and Health*, among others. Moreover, since the Organization values its intellectual property, the Publications Program is developing the transactional capabilities needed to conduct trade of PAHO publications in a digital environment, so that it can recover costs, earn revenues, reduce the burden of publishing costs carried by the regular

budget, and—most importantly—maintain the identity of its ideas, information, and knowledge in the international marketplace.

## **5. Conclusion**

The current Administration of the Secretariat assigns the management of scientific and technical information a critical role in directing health policy and steering health practice throughout the hemisphere. That role renders PAHO a publisher different from any other. PAHO deals with public health in the Americas, and its readers comprise a community of interests. PAHO is convinced that its audience—those who read its print publications and who access its Web site—want substantive and comprehensive coverage of serious public health issues, of major developments, and of trends of real relevance. Its publishing philosophy is a simple one: it sees its public responsibility as being a good steward in the communication of information from sources to beneficiaries by providing content produced to the highest standard of quality that targets the health community throughout the Americas and is tailored to its particular needs and interests.