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CANADA AND THE WORLD HEALTH ORGANIZATION

The World Health Organization is one of 13 intergovernmental organizations that are linked with the United Nations through special agreements arranged by the Economic and Social Council and approved by the General Assembly and the organization concerned. The Specialized Agencies of the United Nations are expert in their respective fields: labour, health, education, food and agriculture, finance and banking, civil aviation, postal matters, telecommunications and meteorology.

History

The World Health Organization originated in a proposal made at the United Nations Conference held in San Francisco in 1945 that there should be created, within the framework of the United Nations, an international agency to deal with all matters of health. As a result, in 1946 representatives of 61 governments met at the International Health Conference in New York, drafted a constitution for the Organization and established an Interim Commission that served until April 7, 1948, when the constitution came into force after its ratification by the required number of countries. The first World Health Assembly, which met in Geneva in June 1948, represented the culmination of efforts to establish a single intergovernmental health agency to replace, and to inherit the functions of, all antecedent organizations, such as the Office International d'Hygiène Publique, the Health Organization of the League of Nations and the Health Division of the United Nations Relief and Rehabilitation Agency, as well as certain regional intergovernmental agencies such as the Pan-American Sanitary Organization(1) and the Pan-Arab Sanitary League.

Canada played a key role in the establishment of the World Health Organization, being one of the 16 nations represented at the Preparatory Conference in Paris in 1945, at which a constitution for the Organization was drafted for submission to the New York Conference in 1946. The late Dr. Brock Chisholm, who headed the Canadian delegation to the Paris and New York conferences and who had done much to foster a new and imaginative organization, was elected Secretary of the Interim Commission and subsequently became the first Director-General of the WHO, a post he held from 1948 to 1953.

(1) Now the Pan-American Health Organization (PAHO).

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