VIRTUAL PUBLIC HEALTH CAMPUS: MODEL OF GOVERNANCE

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VPHC Model of Governance

Organización Panamericana de la Salud
Oficina Regional de la
Organización Mundial de la Salud

1. Purpose

The Virtual Public Health Campus (VPHC) is a technical cooperation strategy of the Pan American Health Organization (PAHO) designed in the context of the *Public Health in the Americas* initiative, aimed at strengthening institutional capacities and public health practices in the Region of the Americas and the performance of the essential public health functions by national health authorities. The Virtual Campus is a decentralized network of people, institutions, and organizations that share courses, resources, services, and educational activities, with the common purpose of improving the competencies of the public health workforce. The Virtual Campus makes intensive use of new information, communication, and health education technology and seeks to become a venue for creativity and innovation in the development of permanent health education policies and processes.

Strategically, the VPHC's actions are guided, among other things, by the United Nations Millennium Development Goals, the Health Agenda for the Americas 2008–2017, and the Health Human Resources Regional Goals for 2008-2015. Conceptually, the Virtual Campus regards primary health care personnel as an integral component of the public health workforce.

In recent years, the Virtual Public Health Campus has been progressively developing its character as a decentralized, collaborative, and open network, and in this process, its Strategic Model has been developed through a dynamic and organic progression. The Strategic Model of the Virtual Public Health Campus is the result of an intense process of collective construction of its identity and its conceptual bases, expressed through its vision and mission, the values and principles that sustain it, and its general objectives. The Strategic Model of the Virtual Campus is an indispensable reference point for the VPHC's future development, operation, and expansion, by ensuring its coherence and comprehensive nature.

The Strategic Model establishes the footing for developing the Virtual Campus's vitality and activity, and the forces and actors who cooperate in a network for a common purpose. For it to be complete, the Strategic Model's different chapters will be edited to make them more complete and precise. At this point, we have planned for an ***educational model***, a ***technological model***, an ***evaluation model***, and a ***financial model***.

The present document seeks to define the essential elements of the ***model of governance*** of the Virtual Public Health Campus, as a central aspect of its strategic model. Basically, it establishes, from a flexible viewpoint, the modalities for the management, coordination, and preservation of the identity of the Campus, as well as its organizational structure, its standards and criteria, and the processes for implementation, monitoring, and follow-up in fulfillment of agreement and commitments with the participating institutions and actors.

2. The Model of Governance of the Virtual Public Health Campus

Governance of the Campus is the dynamic process that guides, regulates, and evaluates the networked educational activities of the institutions, organizations, and people that participate in the VPHC for the fulfillment of its mission. As the name states, it concerns a *model* of governance, with the implication that its concrete manifestation will have to be adapted to various realities, as tends to be the case in institutions, countries, and subregions. However, the model has immediate relevance to the regional architecture of the Campus and defines a proactive footing for the organization of its activities at all levels.

The governance model consists of four essential components: (1) the mission, values, and principles; (2) the actors and their respective roles; (3) the organizational framework; and (4) the regulatory framework (see Figure 1). The mission, values, and the principles set out in the strategic model are essential reference points for the governance model.

VPHC Model of Governance
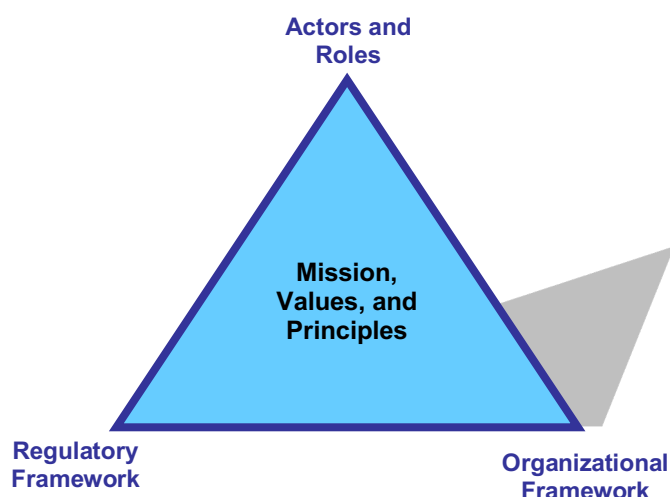
3. Mission, Values, and Principles

The mission, values, and principles form the identity and the raison d'être of the Virtual Public Health Campus, and are explained more fully in the VPHC's Strategic Model.

Mission of the VPHC: The mission of the VPHC is to develop, by means of cooperation, interaction, and networked learning, capacities of institutions and competencies of workers, to maintain a permanent education process that enables continuous improvement in the performance of public health practices. It relies on a management model that operates cooperatively and is decentralized, with the participation of health service provider, steering, advisory, and training institutions, along with associations of technical personnel and professionals who are part of the public health workforce in the countries of the Region of the Americas.

This definition recognizes that the VPHC is a select, persistent, and structured group of institutions committed to the development of public health information and education products and services that share the principles of the Campus and make an open commitment to work through a collaborative and coordinated network to fulfill its mission. This involves a social, not a legal, contract.

The definition also reinforces the concept of the inclusion in the Campus's governance mechanisms of health-related academic, steering, advisory, service, and research institutions, as well as civil society organizations and international cooperation agencies. With respect to specific governance issues, each institution or group has its own interests, roles, and involvement, which may overlap; however, opportunities for exchange, such as those the Campus offers, can transform these differences into occasions for collaboration.

Values: The Virtual Campus fully shares the framework of values that guides PAHO's technical cooperation.

- **Equity**: Striving for fairness and justice by eliminating differences that are unnecessary and avoidable.
- **Excellence:** Achieving the highest quality in what we do.
- **Solidarity:** Promoting shared interests and responsibilities and enabling collective efforts to achieve common goals.
- **Respect**: Embracing the dignity and diversity of individuals, groups, and countries.
- **Integrity**: Assuring transparent, ethical, and accountable performance.

Principles: The VPHC Strategic Model establishes the following principles:

- **Public good:** Development of a collective space belonging to the countries of the Region that is a global public good and operates as a shared source and universal access point.
- **Networking:** Establishment of an open, decentralized management model for the cooperative development of networked learning methods, knowledge, and tools, based on public health evidence and best practices and that addresses the public health human resources priorities set in each country and the Region.
- **Solidarity**: Promotion of solidarity in countries and in people in those geopolitical contexts with the greatest social and public health needs. Foster processes that bridge the digital divide, paying special attention to gender and intercultural perspectives.
- **Quality assurance**: Implement quality, relevance, evaluation, and control processes for the processes, resources, and services for education of the Public Health Workforce.
- **Permanent education:** Strengthening programs for permanent public health education that use a problem-based, transforming approach to public health practice and work.
- **Local capacities**: Support for the development of local capabilities for educational processes, promoting the adoption of knowledge about and the development of tools, methodologies, and technologies for networked learning.

- **Sustainability**: A structure based on criteria for technical and financial sustainability and for universal access.
- **Convergence and standards**: Optimal use of technological innovations that ensure the interoperability of information sources following international standards and prioritizing international practices for free software and initiatives aimed at bridging the digital divide, as developments that can be offered under free or non-free licenses in accordance with fair, equitable, and non-discriminatory criteria.

4. Actors and Roles

Node is the term we use for the basic entities or institutional frameworks that are part of the VPHC and their linkages in the form of a network that respond to a collective health purpose in a defined political-sanitary jurisdiction. The nodes are a space where the areas, units, programs, and projects of an institution or a group of institutions and organizations actively collaborate in a network and share public health educational resources. **Person** is the term we use for any entity, not only an individual, that enters into a relationship with the Campus without being a member of it.

At this time, nodes can be created at the institutional, national, subregional, and regional levels.

4.1. - VPHC nodes

Institutional nodes

The following categories of institutions and organizations can become VPHC nodes:

- *Academic*: health sciences schools or departments, public health schools or master's or doctoral programs, social and preventive medicine departments, community medicine and family and community medicine residency programs.
- *Service*: primary care units, hospitals, local or state health departments, health districts, social security institutes.
- *Research*: research centers, WHO Collaborating Centers.
- *Civil society organizations*: professional and technical associations, unions, community organizations.

Roles

1. Facilitate the contribution of educational resources from professionals and professors in their institution.
2. Publish on the VPHC references to resources that are included in the Campus in their scope of action.
3. Provide information and communicate messages on the development of the Virtual Public Health Campus in its current conception, emphasizing the benefits it provides to professionals and institutions in the Region.

4. Provide published information and necessary messages adapted to the particular interests and concerns of each context.
5. Facilitate analysis and discussion that enable learning the status of opinion and a critical assessment about the VPHC's work.
6. Adapt and implement the VPHC communication strategy in their context.
7. Make recommendations and suggestions for improving the VPHC's organization and operation.

National and subregional nodes

National nodes are made up of the network of participating institutional nodes in a country, the national health authority, and the Pan American Health Organization Office. At this time, there is no subregional node of the Virtual Public Health Campus. However, this is a future possibility as in the case of the Caribbean Community, CARICOM, where there are important subregional institutions.

Roles

1. Preparation of policy proposals, guidelines, and tools for the country and/or subregional node.
2. Development and establishment of criteria on the inclusion of new institutions in the node, forum moderation, and management of accepted projects.
3. Verification of compliance with the agreements and commitments of the Management Group and committees that are formed.
4. Accept, recognize, and register new institutions in the node.
5. Evaluation of proposals and projects submitted to the node by participating institutions or by national and international public health entities.
6. Contribution of public health expertise, techniques, experiences, and educational resources that address the human resources priorities in the country and/or subregion.
7. Selection of course beneficiaries, together with national authorities.
8. Registry of tutors and personnel trained by the country node.
9. Dissemination of best practices and success stories, through approval of the VPHC communication strategy.
10. Preparation of the work plan and timetable for the VPHC node's national and/or subregional activities.
11. Carry out semiannual self-evaluations of the node, using the online form (February and August).

The regional node

The regional node—also called the Virtual Public Health Campus integration node—is comprised of the Pan American Health Organization (PAHO).

PAHO is an international technical cooperation agency that serves as the specialized intergovernmental agency for health both for the United Nations system and the Inter-American system (Organization of American States). The Organization serves as the Regional Office for the Americas of the World Health Organization.

Roles

1. Preparation of policy proposals, guidelines, and tools for the Campus nodes.
2. Contribution to the preparation of the VPHC's guidelines and standards in the national and subregional area.
3. Verification of the fulfillment of agreements and commitments of the steering committee, coordination group, quality committee, and technical committees that are formed.
4. Acceptance of new country and/or subregional nodes.
5. Promotion of national, subregional, and regional cooperation.
6. Contribution of public health education expertise, techniques, and experiences.
7. Dissemination of best practices and success stories, through approval of the VPHC communication strategy.
8. Evaluation of proposals and projects submitted to the regional node by participating institutions or by national and international public health entities.
9. Preparation of the work plan and timetable for the VPHC's regional activities.
10. Supervision, oversight, and evaluation of the VPHC nodes.

The Inter-American Center for Social Security Studies (CIESS), as a regional agency, will have a role, to be specifically established, coordinating with the social security institutions that are part of national VPHC nodes.

4.2. - People

Individuals, whether personally and/or as institutional representatives, can access the VPHC and participate in:

- Searching for and/or downloading public health educational resources.
- Creating learning objects of any complexity.
- Applying for enrollment in courses.
- Opportunities for indexing and/or adding an educational resource to share.
- Preparation of virtual, partially in-person, and in-person public health courses with network support.
- Personalizing access to information on their interests, using RSS channels.
- Public health discussion forums.
- Making recommendations and suggestions to improve the VPHC's organization and operation.

5. Organizational Framework

The organizational framework of the Virtual Campus is shown in the figure in Annex 1. It is based on the following premises:

- Criteria for transparency, accountability, and the need to address all public policy issues related to the governance of the Campus in a coordinated manner.

- Opportunity for dialog on equal terms between all the nodes and institutions participating in the Campus.

- Coordination among all Campus participants at each level.

5.1. - Regional level

The organizational framework for the Virtual Public Health Campus at the level of the Region of the Americas includes the following governing structures:

- *Steering committee*
- *Coordination group*
- *Quality committee*
- *Technical committees (ad hoc)*
- *Technical secretariat*

Steering Committee: The Virtual Public Health Campus is an initiative of the Pan American Health Organization. Responsibility for the leadership and management of the VPHC is under the Health Human Resources Development Project of the Health Systems and Services Area of the Organization. However, the VPHC is understood as a corporate initiative that involves the entire Organization, including Headquarters, Country Offices, the Subregional Office (OCPC), and Specialized Centers. The Virtual Campus Steering Committee is chaired by the Director of the Organization or the person she designates. Furthermore, the following are also members of the Steering Committee: manager of the Health Systems and Services Area (HSS), manager of the Information and Knowledge Management Area (IKM), director of BIREME, manager of the Information Systems Technology Area, Coordinator of the Health Human Resources Development Project, and two representatives from the Regional Coordination Group. The VPHC manager serves as secretary of the Committee. As an initiative of the Organization, the Virtual Campus can be submitted to the consideration of the Governing Bodies and of the Member States comprising them.

The functions and obligations of the Steering Committee are based on country priorities for developing the public health workforce and are the following:

1. Agree on the strategic guidelines that define the thematic scope of the Virtual Public Health Campus and that guide its strategic educational offerings in response to the public health mandates, policies, plans, strategic objectives, and agendas adopted by the Member States.
2. Periodically review and agree on the strategic model of the Virtual Public Health Campus and its different components.
3. Review, agree on, and monitor the progress of the medium-term development plan (5 years) for the Virtual Public Health Campus.

4. Ensure the basic political, technical, and material conditions for the effective performance and growth of the VPHC.
5. Promote linkages and synergy between the VPHC and other knowledge management and research networks in the Organization.
6. Support external mobilization of financial resources for the VPHC.
7. Adopt and support a communication strategy for the Virtual Campus with the Member States and other national, subregional, regional, or global institutions or organizations.
8. Encourage the Organization's different units and agencies to contribute and actively participate in the Campus's work.
9. Acceptance of new country and/or subregional nodes.
10. Others as needed.

Regional Coordination Group: The Regional Coordination Group is made up of the coordinators of the national and subregional nodes of the Virtual Public Health Campus, the Secretary General of the Inter-American Center for Social Security Studies (CIESS) or his or her representative, and the PAHO working team responsible for the VPHC. National authorities will participate in the capacity of guests.

The principal *functions* of the Regional Coordination Group are the following:

1. Prepare the VPHC development plan, using a medium-term perspective, and annual work plans.
2. Identify and analyze the progress and difficulties of the VPHC, and formulate corresponding commitments to action.
3. Monitor the development of educational, technical, and technological capabilities in all areas of Campus performance, and formulate proposals for compatibly strengthening them across all the nodes.
4. Develop, review, or propose common operating models, systems, and tools, such as the evaluation model.
5. Promote communication and technical cooperation among the Campus's different nodes— institutional as well as national and subregional ones.
6. Propose new national and subregional nodes to the Steering Committee.
7. Propose, agree on, and form ad hoc working committees on subjects of interest to the VPHC.
8. Form the Virtual Campus regional quality committee, review its conclusions, and adopt actions necessary for the oversight and improvement of the Campus's quality.
9. Review and implement recommendations from the ad hoc working committees.
10. Be a discussion and exchange forum on innovation in teaching practices and the inclusion of new information and communication technology (ICT).
11. Develop proposals and recommendations for the Virtual Public Health Campus's Steering Committee.

Regional Quality Committee: This is an advisory committee, the composition of which will be decided by the Coordination Group.

The principal functions of the Committee are the following:

1. Periodically evaluate the quality and relevance of the Campus's educational resources and develop corresponding recommendations for the Coordination Group.
2. Develop methodologies and innovations regarding on-line education quality standards or related aspects.

Technical committees (ad hoc): These will be convened as needed by the Coordination Group to study subjects of importance to the regional node and to present findings and recommendations.

Technical secretariat: Chaired by a PAHO regional adviser for servicing the Campus and made up of a webmaster, a content manager, an educational designer, and an applications developer. Specialists in scientific information, communication, and administration will be included depending on need and feasibility.

The technical secretariat has the following *functions*:

1. Guarantee technological, methodological, and managerial training, infrastructure, and practical application of the Campus in the regional area.
2. Continuously maintain the regional portal of the Virtual Campus.
3. Provide technical support for the expansion of the Virtual Campus to other countries and subregions.
4. Ensure compliance with approved policies and regulations.

5.2. - National/subregional area

The national and subregional areas will adapt the organizational framework, in line with their level of development, special features, and needs. It is proposed that each national and subregional area have a **Management Group** and a **Quality Committee**. The Coordination Group can be created depending on the Node's level of development and how many institutions belong to it.

National or Subregional Management Group: This Group is made up of the directors of the institutions belonging to the Virtual Campus network in the country or the subregion or their delegates, a representative of the National Health Authority (or a corresponding subregional entity), and a representative of the PAHO Country or Subregional Office. Every two years, one director will be selected from among the institution directors to serve as the Group's chairperson.

The functions and obligations of the national node and its Management Group are based on the country's priorities for developing the public health workforce and include:

1. Preparation of policy proposals, guidelines, and tools for the country and/or subregional node.
2. Development and establishment of criteria on the inclusion of new institutions in the node, forum moderation, and management of accepted projects.
3. Verification of compliance with the agreements and commitments of the Management Group and committees that are formed.
4. Accept, recognize, and register new institutions in the node.

5. Evaluation of proposals and projects submitted to the node by participating institutions or by national and international public health entities.
6. Contribution of public health expertise, techniques, experiences, and educational resources that address the human resources priorities in the country and/or subregion.
7. Selection of course beneficiaries, together with national authorities.
8. Registry of tutors and personnel trained by the country node.
9. Dissemination of best practices and success stories, through approval of the VPHC communication strategy.
10. Preparation of the work plan and timetable for the VPHC node's national and/or subregional activities.
11. Carry out semiannual self-evaluations of the Node, using the online form (February and August).

Quality Committee: The Quality Committee is made up of experts in aspects regarding teaching methodology, technology, and scientific and technical information, from the node's member institutions.

The committee has the following *functions*:

1. Periodically evaluate the quality of the Campus's educational resources, in particular the online courses in the national area.
2. Issue recommendations for their improvement, based on the results obtained.

Technical Team: Chaired by a health professional designated by the Management Group for servicing the Campus, and made up of the country Node Webmaster and those responsible for the repository and for the node's courses, in addition to other specialists and technical personnel consistent with the level of development.

The Technical Team has the following functions:

1. Guarantee the technological, methodological, and managerial infrastructure and practical application of the Campus in the national and/or subregional area.
2. Ensure compliance with approved policies and regulations.

Technical committees (ad hoc). These will be convened as needed by the Management Group to study issues of importance to the country area and will present findings and recommendations.

5.3. - Institutional area

Each institution and/or organization will adapt its node's organizational structure and functions according to its particular conditions and level of development, to guarantee the workability and quality control of the educational resources it contributes to the Campus. We suggest that the participating institutions set up a *Virtual Public Health Campus Project* chaired by the Director of the Institution, with the support of the relevant university authorities, when applicable. The Project should include a technical team for Campus leadership, operation, and management. In addition, an internal

advisory committee could be constituted, with the participation of the faculty, the public health library, and other pertinent entities.

6. Regulatory Framework

The VPHC provides the necessary tools for **creating, sharing, and collaborating** on the development of educational resources through open, decentralized institutional and/or individual participation. To this end, the Campus is essentially made up of an integration portal, a virtual classroom, a repository of educational resources, a discussion forum, and other communication and networking tools, including wikis, a situation room, Ning, and Elluminate.

6.1. - Institutional participation

Teaching, service, and research centers and organizations, etc., participate in the VPHC essentially as **institutional nodes** that contribute and share educational resources. However they can also assume a coordination role as **a country and subregional node.**

In the particular case of the regional area, the **integration node** is at the headquarters of the Pan American Health Organization, where the areas, units, projects, and country Representative Offices can collaborate, providing educational resources on priority public health issues. The different types of institutional, country, and subregional nodes that constitute the VPHC network are linked at the regional level, based on the principle of interoperability.

Any **VPHC node** is a virtual forum where part of the connections of other virtual forums that share the same characteristics and purposes come together, which in turn are also nodes. These are all linked among themselves in a non-hierarchical way to form the Campus network.

For institutions to become a VPHC Node, they have to meet the following **requirements**:

- Accept the principles and objectives of the VPHC.
- Fulfill the minimum requirements for interoperability.
- Systematically contribute educational resources.

As long as the institutions fulfill the previous requirements, the VPHC will guarantee them the **technological, methodological, and managerial support** necessary for the node's adequate operation.

This does not exclude open access to any available resource, people, and institutions that can create links or open RSS channels to their Website or personal desktop.

The VPHC, among other things, contributes the following to participating institutions:

- An open platform for achieving efficient information and knowledge management.
- Access to quality public health educational resources on the Internet.
- The opportunity for sharing the best health education experiences.
- Technological and methodological tools for creating and developing public health learning objects.

Internally, institutions should encourage their areas, departments, and projects to have their most experienced, productive professionals and technical personnel include their best presentations, articles, etc. in the Campus Repository.

Resources for sharing on the VPHC have an educational purpose related to the area of public health and are of four types:

1. Courses (teaching activities) organized as academic-tutorial or self-directed.
2. Learning resources (objects) that have a teaching objective in a defined educational context and can be reused in different courses.
3. Learning tools, including software, guides, manuals, methodologies, etc., of interest for teaching public health.
4. Research that includes theses, projects, and protocols in the field of public health education.

The institutions belonging to Campus nodes can share and disseminate their "Public Health" courses (included with payment of enrollment) provided they contribute some course, space in courses, or educational resources that can be used at no cost by other institutions and individuals.

6.2. - Individual participation

Searching for and/or downloading public health educational resources is totally open and free (no registration required) and is done on the Campus portal (www.campusvirtualsp.org) or through its different nodes. A more advanced search can be done in the Campus Repository (www.campusvirtualsp.org/repository/).

From the VPHC portal, one has access to RSS channels with information on new resources being shared and constantly updated, according to personal interest.

The VPHC provides the service of forums (www.campusvirtualsp.org/forums/) to open discussions on subjects related to public health education, which can be personalized in accordance with professional and institutional interests. The public forums are open, while the private ones require prior registration.

Educators and professionals in general who are interested in creating public health learning objects of any type of complexity will find tools for doing so on the VPHC portal. Professors who wish to use the VPHC Virtual Classroom (http://devserver.paho.org/virtualcampus/moodle/) to publish their in-person, virtual, and mixed-mode public health courses can do so following selection, registration, and application.

From the Virtual Classroom, following user registration, one can request admission to open courses with open enrollment. The courses offered by institutional, country, or subregional nodes that are carried out on their own platforms are accessed directly from those portals.

Educators and professionals who wish to share any of their resources on the Virtual Public Health Campus for teaching purposes, whether or not it has been published on the Internet, can do so directly in their country Repository, following registration.

6.3. - Intellectual property rights

In accordance with the provisions of the VPHC Principles, the principles of the **Creative Commons 3.0 Unported license** will be applied. With this CC license, educational resources published on the VPHC may be **copied, distributed, and transmitted**. They may also be **reused** for the creation of new resources and other teaching processes, <u>**under the following conditions**</u>:

- **Attribution:** You must attribute credit for the educational resources in the manner specified by the author or licensor (but not in any way that suggests that they endorse you or your use of the work).
- **Noncommercial:** These resources may not be used for commercial purposes.
- For the reuse or distribution of these resources, you must make clear to others the license terms of this work.
- Any of these conditions can be waived if you get permission from the copyright holder.
- In no way are any of the author's moral rights affected by the license.

6.4. - Quality and relevance

Any individual or institution, in an open, decentralized manner, can index and/or include a resource on the VPHC; however, its publication will take effect in three to five days, following an assessment of its quality and relevance by the corresponding node.

Each node should designate one or more previously trained people as being responsible for publishing, who will guarantee quality control over the resources it receives from individuals or sections of the institutions in its area of coverage.

In the particular case of the courses that are published on the Campus, the institutions that offer them will ensure that they comply with the established methodological regulations, in order to protect their institution's prestige and reputation.

To guarantee the relevance and quality of the learning objects and teaching activities that are implemented on the VPHC, every node should designate a professor responsible for their oversight and supervision.