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Establishing a School of Public Health in western amazon

Implantação da Escola de Saúde Pública na Amazônia Ocidental

Implementación de la Escuela de Salud Pública en la Amazonía Occidental

ABSTRACT

Established in August 2024, the Rondônia State Institute of Public Health Education marked an important advance for Brazil's Unified Health System in the Western Amazon. Based on qualitative, descriptive, and exploratory research, this experience report analyzes the challenges and management strategies associated with the transition from a SUS technical school to a School of Public Health. Documentary analysis and a literature review were used to identify map implementation stages and emphasizes logistical constraints, intersectoral coordination, and regional specificities. As a strategic space for the Brazil's National Policy of Permanent Health Education, the School of Public Health supports ongoing and integrated training for health professionals and it is expected to improve health outcomes, reduce regional inequities, and strengthen state institutional capacity. The initiative embodies SUS' principles, contributing to improved care and policies tailored to local needs. It also offers relevant insights for similar initiatives.

Keywords: Continuing Education; Public Health Education; Health Management; Unified Health System (SUS).

RESUMO

A criação do Instituto Estadual de Educação em Saúde Pública em Rondônia representa um avanço crucial para o SUS na Amazônia Ocidental. Esta experiência, fundamentada em pesquisa qualitativa e exploratória, examina os desafios e estratégias na transformação da escola técnica do SUS em uma escola de saúde pública. A análise documental e revisão bibliográfica elucidaram as etapas de implantação, sublinhando desafios logísticos, articulação intersectorial e adaptação a particularidades regionais. A escola surge como espaço para a Política Nacional de Educação Permanente em Saúde, influenciando positivamente indicadores de saúde, reduzindo desigualdades e fortalecendo capacidades institucionais. O estudo ilustra o compromisso com os princípios do SUS e a qualificação do cuidado, consolidando políticas públicas ajustadas às necessidades locais. Este trabalho oferece insights para iniciativas similares, destacando

soluções inovadoras para enfrentar as disparidades regionais na gestão da educação em saúde.

Descritores: *Educação Permanente; Educação em Saúde Pública; Gestão em Saúde; Sistema Único de Saúde (SUS).*

RESUMEN

La creación del Instituto Estatal de Educación en Salud Pública en Rondônia representa un avance crucial para el SUS en la Amazonía Occidental. Esta experiencia, fundamentada en investigación cualitativa y exploratoria, examina los desafíos y estrategias en la transformación de la escuela técnica del SUS en una escuela de salud pública. El análisis documental y la revisión bibliográfica elucidaron las etapas de implementación, subrayando desafíos logísticos, articulación intersectorial y adaptación a particularidades regionales. La escuela surge como un espacio para la Política Nacional de Educación Permanente en Salud, influyendo positivamente en los indicadores de salud, reduciendo desigualdades y fortaleciendo capacidades institucionales. El estudio ilustra el compromiso con los principios del SUS y la cualificación del cuidado, consolidando políticas públicas ajustadas a las necesidades locales. Este trabajo ofrece perspectivas para iniciativas similares, destacando soluciones innovadoras para enfrentar las disparidades regionales en la gestión de la educación en salud.

Palavras chave: *Educación Continua; Educación en Salud Pública; Gestión de la Salud; Sistema Único de Salud.*

INTRODUCTION

The Western Amazon is a region marked by geographic barriers, socioeconomic inequalities, and cultural diversity, which create persistent challenges in health care. In this context, establishing a School of Public Health strengthens Brazil's Unified Health System (SUS) by supporting a health workforce that can reduce gaps in care and provide services that are effective and responsive to regional needs¹⁻⁴.

In Rondônia State (northern Brazil), the Rondônia State Institute of Public Health Education (ROSIPHE) was formally established in 2024 following a process that began in 2019 to restructure state-level health education. The transition from the former SUS technical school to a School of Public Health broadened its range of courses, reinforced Brazil's National Policy of Permanent Health Education, and improved integration between education and health services across health care.

State schools of public health, affiliated with State Health Departments, promote the training, qualification, and ongoing professional development of SUS workers. Regional health needs guide these actions and aim to address short-, medium-, and long-term challenges faced by local health systems. In northern Brazil, where access to health education is uneven, the scenario in Rondônia is notable due to its adaptation of management strategies to local constraints^{1-3,5}.

Given this context, this experience report aimed to describe the School of Public Health's implementation in Western Amazon, focusing on the main challenges and the health education management strategies used to strengthen professional training and continuing education within the SUS in this region.

METHODS

This study presents a qualitative, descriptive, and exploratory experience report on the School of Public Health's implementation in Rondônia between 2019–2024. It examined health education management strategies across planning, interinstitutional coordination, legal institutionalization, and the expansion of educational offerings for SUS workers. These strategies were developed during the transition of the former SUS Technical School into the ROSIPHE, now associated with the State Department of Health, and draw on the authors' direct involvement in the institution's implementation and consolidation through roles in management, educational planning, and strategic execution.

Data were collected from secondary sources such as institutional documents, legislation, ordinances, action plans, technical reports, and administrative records related to the School of Public Health's implementation. Additionally, a literature review on permanent health education, Schools of Public Health, and workforce management within the SUS was conducted to contextualize the experience within the broader framework of public health policy.

This study does not involve human participants, and it is therefore exempt from review by a research ethics committee, in accordance with the Brazilian National Health Council's resolution no. 510/2016.

RESULTS

The ROSIPHE's implementation followed the legal and regulatory frameworks that designate SUS as responsible for health workforce education and training, in accordance with Article 200(III) of the 1988 Brazilian Federal Constitution and Brazil's National Policy of Permanent Health Education (ordinance GM/MS no. 198/2004).

In 2019, the former SUS Technical School began its transformation through the development of the "Establishing the Rondônia's School of Public Health" project, in partnership with Brazil's National Council of State Health Secretaries and the Pan American Health Organization. The process included formal state government endorsement, strategic planning workshops, and the submission of an institutional proposal to the State Department of Health for approval.

Before its formal institutionalization, the SUS Technical School—then known as the Technical and Professional Education Center in the Health Area—was already engaged in permanent education activities, maintained interinstitutional partnerships, and contributed to managing multiprofessional health residency programs within the State Department of Health. Although it did not yet have formal legal status as a School of Public Health, these activities demonstrated it was necessary to expand the institution's scope and strengthen the state's health education governance.

The institutional development was accompanied by structural investments, most notably a dedicated headquarters, which expanded the institution's physical and operational capacity for educational activities. The new facility features administrative offices, classrooms, laboratories, a library, an auditorium, common areas, and accessibility features, thereby broadening both educational and administrative actions.

During the COVID-19 pandemic, the institution became part of the state emergency response committee, providing training programs and supporting the organization of care pathways within the State Department of Health. Subsequently, in 2023, Rondônia joined the Program for Strengthening the Workforce Management and Health Education, established by ordinance GM/MS no. 2.168/2023, and developed the State Plan for Workforce Management and Health Education, with the former technical school's active involvement.

Formal institutionalization was achieved with the enactment of Complementary Law no. 1,248 of August 7, 2024, which transformed the Technical and Professional Education Center in the Health Area into ROSIPHE, an autonomous public entity linked to the State Department of Health. Following this legal milestone, the ROSIPHE was incorporated into the State Subsystem of

Public Health Education, with responsibility for coordinating technical and higher education, multiprofessional residencies, research, extension activities, and *lato sensu* and *stricto sensu* graduate programs.

Regarding scientific knowledge production and use, ROSIPHE established a scientific evidence unit and joined Brazil's Evidence-informed Policy Network. It also established a research ethics committee to strengthen ethical and scientific standards for research conducted within the State Department of Health.

The Institute's actions were further expanded through partnerships with universities, professional councils, and national public institutions, as well as its support for the State Health Council and participation in the State Equity Committee. These initiatives have consolidated ROSIPHE as a central reference for permanent health education in Rondônia.

DISCUSSION

In the Western Amazon, a region marked by geographic barriers, socioeconomic inequalities, and cultural diversity, ROSIPHE has strengthened the SUS by integrating professional training, workforce management, and local health needs. This context in Rondônia reflects the State Schools of Public Health's traditional role: to support health system organization and improve the health care quality. Therefore, ROSIPHE incorporates key features commonly associated with these institutions, including a commitment to SUS and Brazil's National Policy of Permanent Health Education principles, advocacy for public training, and reinforcing institutional links among health workers. Focusing educational initiatives on local and regional demands enhances health system responsiveness and promotes more contextualized, effective, and socially responsible professional practices, as extensively discussed in the public health education literature^{1-3,5}.

Nevertheless, Schools of Public Health face primarily structural challenges. Precarious employment conditions, occupational illness and burnout, insufficient funding, technological limitations, and weaknesses in information systems all hinder the continuity and systematic evaluation of educational activities. Thus, monitoring and evaluation tools must be employed to enhance permanent health education management and support evidence-informed decision-making^{4,8}.

These institutions' sustainability is directly related to policy decisions that treat health education as a state responsibility, rather than as a peripheral or temporary initiative. This perspective is critical in northern and northeastern Brazil, where historical inequalities in professional training access persist. Given this context, establishing ROSIPHE as an autonomous public entity sought to secure greater administrative and financial autonomy, a key factor to ensure the continuity of Schools of Public Health^{8,10}.

The COVID-19 pandemic demonstrated how these institutions can support both health management and public health responses. In Rondônia, ROSIPHE's involvement in technical support and professional training during the crisis

underscored the contribution of Schools of Public Health to applied research, planning, and interinstitutional collaboration^{1,9}.

Institutional strengthening was also expressed through new approaches to produce and apply scientific knowledge. In creating a scientific evidence unit and joining the Brazil's Evidence-informed Policy Network, Rondônia followed a broader movement toward evidence-informed policymaking promoted by the World Health Organization. This initiative linked managers, health workers, and researchers, turning scientific findings into practical guidance for decision-making in the SUS⁶. Complementarily, a research ethics committee at ROSIPHE illustrates the efforts to promote research and scientific ethics consistent with Brazilian regulations and enhances the State Department of Health's capacity to conduct studies that generate contextualized and socially relevant knowledge.

Beyond strengthening management and professional training in the SUS, the ROSIPHE also benefits the community directly and indirectly by supporting a more effective, humanized care and fostering stronger connections among education, health services, and local communities. Such integration ensures that training activities are aligned to the users' concrete needs and their territorial contexts.

Ultimately, strengthening State Schools of Public Health requires ongoing interinstitutional cooperation, legal and pedagogical support, research incentives, financial sustainability, and adoption of educational technologies, all of which are consistent with the United Nations 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. Therefore, the ROSIPHE's consolidation is both a political and technical advance, integrating professional training and management in a model suited to the Amazon region. Moreover, despite financial and geographic constraints, continuing health education is a consistent strategy for improving SUS and promoting health equity in the Western Amazon^{1,6}.

CONCLUSION

Establishing ROSIPHE as a School of Public Health strengthens the SUS in the Western Amazon, with permanent health education serving as a practical foundation for professional development and for addressing regional inequalities. More than an administrative initiative, ROSIPHE is a management tool aligned with SUS principles which integrates education and service, thereby advancing professional competencies, and contributing to more equitable and effective health care. Through solutions adapted to the Amazonian context, the scenario in Rondônia offers valuable guidance for other regions and emphasizes the importance of planning, monitoring, and continuous evaluation in health education.

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