

# Interview: Raúl Riquelme Cacho - President of the Health Commission, CONCAMIN, Mexico

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13.09.2016

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*Raúl Riquelme Cacho, president of the health commission of the Confederation of Industrial Chambers of the United Mexican States (CONCAMIN), reveals the recent alignment of CONCAMIN, which stands as the most important industry organization of Mexico, with the main pharmaceutical associations, and discusses the cross-sector objectives that unite these stakeholders: jointly elaborate solutions to bring better health outcomes to Mexican workers and further propel the economic productivity of the country.*

**As an introduction to our readers, could you please explain the main activities of the CONCAMIN and your importance in both the business and political landscape in Mexico?**

CONCAMIN was set up in 1918, and operates as the representative body of the different industry sectors and economic activities that are of high importance for the economic development of Mexico. CONCAMIN integrates 46 national chambers, 14 regional chambers, and 44 associations gathering a variety of productive sectors of our country, which account for up to 30 percent of the Mexican GDP.

By law, we operate as the recognized consultant to the government regarding every interest that affects the industries we cover, and in this regard, we have to strictly scrutinize and follow any information given or action announced by the government or the Mexican Congress. We moreover collaborate at the three levels of action of the Mexican State, which gives us a very broad and

extensive amount of responsibility.

CONCAMIN's recently appointed president, Manuel Herrera Vega, has been doing an outstanding job pulling all industries back into the mix, as for example the pharmaceutical sector. In this objective to create more unity around CONCAMIN, we recently held our first formal gathering, including all industries, in order to learn about the issues and agendas across the entire industrial spectrum.

For a long time, different Mexican pharmaceutical associations, like AMIIF or ANAFAM, have been operating separately from CONCAMIN, mainly because of the high technicality and the important market specificities that set this industry apart. In the meantime, CONCAMIN's Health Commission, was mainly related to all others actors that have had an impact on health, including food, nutrition, and beverage industries. Nevertheless, we are now closely cooperating again with the pharmaceutical sector, and we are currently looking at the synergies and knowledge-sharing that this cooperation could bring to all stakeholders.

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### **What are some of the key topics on the agenda of the health commission?**

CONCAMIN's health commission has been working over the last ten years to promote the idea that everyone in industry is also responsible to improve public health levels in our country. As part of this, we have been notably pursuing new labeling efforts for food and drink, designing and implementing a policy that would require clear, upfront labeling of nutritional facts, especially when a food is probably high in calories.

Our first proposal was not accepted by the government, so we have gone back and made revisions and updates to improve it. We have been working with and interviewing a variety of NGO's and related stakeholders during this process, which has been extremely helpful to better design this new proposal.

### **Obesity and diabetes are two major epidemics in Mexico. Do you feel that the industry is sufficiently involved in finding solutions to these two crucial issues?**

Nobody in this world has a single and the best solution to these two epidemics. These epidemics have to do with the person, the human being and their decisions, not simply what they eat, but what they do with their lifestyle choices on the whole. We need an effort from all stakeholders, the government and the industry, and the most emphasis should be placed on education, prevention and early diagnosis.

We need to educate children, to provide them with more and better tools and give them a better opportunity to make choices that lead them into having a healthier life and brighter future. The children will then be able to relay this information to their parents, which is particularly necessary, because inspiring changes in lifestyle choices of older adults is incredibly difficult. Children can become the drivers of this change within their families if we properly educate them. You can notice the relevance of this knowledge-based approach when you look at pharmaceutical companies in Mexico, they are currently discussing how to improve our population's health as a whole - rather than basically discussing providing medicines and drugs.

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Health is not limited to pharmaceuticals or even the healthcare sector; it includes all industries. Obesity and diabetes clearly stand as a topic where we can connect different industries to discuss the best information and best practices as to better communicate to the consumer what is appropriate or not for their health.

**You mentioned this renewed relationship with CONCAMIN and AMIIF, the industry association that gathers 43 innovative pharmaceutical companies implanted in Mexico. Do you see the current health context in Mexico as something that is integral to the growth of the economy?**

Yes, it is clear that high and evermore growing rates of obesity and diabetes have a negative impact on our country's productivity. This is a fact scientifically proven, and not only as a mere assumption, and we need to work to make that known across the board. To fully unlock the economic potential of our country, we need to increase the capacity and capabilities of our workers and citizens - and it starts with health. From each and every aspect of our workers' lives, be it at home, at work and institutionally, we need to address this issue.

This renewed and strengthened collaboration between CONCAMIN and the different pharmaceutical associations is a strong signal that improving health is now an issue that is being raised across all industries, while we fortunately see that the government is increasingly supportive as well. In this effort, we cannot simply look at discontinuing or eliminating certain products of the market: whatever action we take must be human-based, if we want to make an impact in the everyday life of the Mexican population. In the grand scheme of things, CONCAMIN does not have the weight of law behind us, so joining forces all together also makes our voices more powerful. We are more powerful and consequential together than we ever could be apart. The world is changing, the status quo is changing and being questioned: to best achieve our objectives during these

tumultuous times of change we must face them together.

Beside this common approach, we also want our renewed collaboration with the pharmaceutical sector to become a real knowledge sharing between them and all other CONCAMIN industries. In Mexico, the pharmaceutical industry has been impressively polishing and sharpening its expertise over the past few years, be it related to regulatory approach or manufacturing processes for instance, and we now want to mutually benefit from each other's skillsets and capacities to drive our companies to new heights

**Talking about being part of an ecosystem, you met with Mr. Julio Sanchez y Tepoz, with the new head of Cofepris, Mexico's sanitary agency. What have been the main outcomes of this meeting?**

During this meeting we were mainly focused on identifying what is needed for Mexico, both from an industrial and health point of view. In this regard, Cofepris' openness to engage and discuss required improvements with the industry is remarkable and quite unique from an international standpoint. Furthermore, we must also recognize that the organization has proceeded to a lot of positive transformations, not just with regards to the growth of the pharmaceutical industry, but also on what the Mexican population needs to access better health outcomes, which is absolutely paramount. Once again, it highlights how Mexican key stakeholders such as CONCAMIN and Cofepris, are ready to go beyond a narrow sectorial approach, joining hands to bring more welfare to our workers and citizens, and further propel the economy of our country.

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**Specifically, as president of the health commission, how would you define the fundamental objective you want to achieve?**

CONCAMIN should represent the chance to realign issues, with both industry and government, doing whatever it takes, to move the country forward. If when you are presented with an issue, and you simply dwell on it, you will get nowhere, and no progress will be ever made. Rather, we need to be focused on bringing to our country and its economy what is needed to progress, as at the end of the day, we are all Mexican citizens.

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