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Implementation of an indigenous health policy in Pólo-base Angra dos Reis, Rio de Janeiro, Brasil: impediments and perspectives

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Objectives: To discuss the Brazilian National Indigenous Health Policy devised in the 1990s, with reference to the creation of the Indigenous Health Care Subsystem (SASI in Portuguese) and its application in Angra dos Reis, Brazil.

Methodology: Descriptive analysis

Results: The authors review the events that gave rise to health reforms in Brazil, dating back to the health reform that resulted in the launch of the National Health System (SUS in Portuguese) to the creation of the National Indigenous Health Policy to protect indigenous rights, including health. Areas called “Special Health Districts” were created.

In the implementation of the Indigenous Health Care Subsystem, the authors found that numerous problems were due to socio-cultural variation among indigenous cultures, and added to a lack of central coordination in the implementation of the program.

Conclusions: Creating a system to serve the indigenous peoples is a challenging task that requires understanding and taking into account their vision of the cosmos, their social, political, and cultural organization, and their traditional ways of life. Inter-institutional work is necessary for resolution of the multiple conflicts inherent in the way the program was carried out. These conflicts include high health worker turnover, which results in breaking professional continuity and the loss of experience and positive results, and a need for clear rules on the utilization of human, financial, and material resources, and periodic evaluation of the results.