



PROPOSAL

DEVELOPMENT OF A HEALTH RESEARCH AGENDA FOR THE CARIBBEAN

BACKGROUND

In the Nassau Declaration of 2001, the Heads of Government of CARICOM championed the importance of evidence-based decision making^[1]. This is consistent with the growing ground swell for health policies, programs and practices in the Caribbean to be informed by the best scientific knowledge.

Since the early 1990's the concept of Essential National Health Research (ENHR) was introduced to low and middle income countries as a strategy to ensure that limited resources for health are invested in areas with the highest social return. It promotes research as being essential to guide resource allocation and address issues of inequity. It also reinforces the links between research, action and policy^[2]. Many developing countries, including the Caribbean, encounter several constraints which highlight the need for ENHR and the prioritization of research. There are limited numbers of researchers and research centres, and funding for health research is usually dependent on international donor agencies. More often than not, the research agendas of the latter are already set and not consistent with the health priorities of the country. The result is that researchers are enticed way from important national or regional issues^[3].

The Caribbean Cooperation in Health Initiative (CCH) identifies the health priorities of the Caribbean. The latest edition, the CCH III, was recently endorsed by CARICOM member states and includes eight program areas:

1. Communicable Diseases.
2. Food and Nutrition.
3. Chronic Non-Communicable Diseases.
4. Human Resource Development.
5. Family and Community Health Services.
6. Strengthening Health Systems.
7. Environmental Health.
8. Mental Health.

There is a requirement for the activities conducted to achieve the Expected Results for the various CCH III Programme Areas to be well grounded in research. It is therefore necessary that a Health Research Agenda be developed to complement the CCH III.

In addition, one of the principal strategies proposed in the recently developed Health Research Policy of the Caribbean^[4] is the development, at the regional level, of a health research agenda in consultation with all stakeholders. This agenda would then be available to be adopted or adapted at a national level by CARICOM Countries.

The process to develop the Caribbean Health Research Agenda is therefore driven by the need:

1. To fill gaps in the availability of locally relevant research evidence to inform health policies, intervention programs and practices at the national and regional levels.
2. For health research priorities to complement the recently defined health priorities in the CCH III.
3. To serve as a guide to researchers and funding agencies indicating the current priorities of the Caribbean.

GOAL AND OBJECTIVES

Overall Goal

To develop a Health Research Agenda for the Caribbean that will clearly identify priority areas and guide research in the region to facilitate the achievement of health-related development goals and improve the health outcomes of the people in the Caribbean.

Objectives

1. To identify areas for research that should be given high priority in the Caribbean. Priorities will be developed for each Program Area of the CCH III.
2. To identify critical gaps and prepare a health research agenda that can be adapted or adopted by Caribbean countries.

METHODS

Oversight of the development of the Caribbean Health Research Agenda will be provided by a Steering Committee comprising two CMOs, two CHRC Scientific Secretaries, the project manager and a representative from The Council on Health for Research Development (COHRED). COHRED will provide key technical support and has been supporting the development of National Research Agendas in countries globally for over fifteen (15) years.

The development and implementation of the Agenda will be conducted in six (6) phases.

PHASE 1

In the first phase, background documents will be collated that highlight the research related issues that need to be considered. Documents will include the CCH III, the Caribbean Health Research Policy and any other relevant documents available such as the Report of the Caribbean Commission on Health and Development. Where possible, publications that include a situation analysis of the particular CCH III Programme Area will be shared. Such publications may

include a review of literature of issues such as disease burden, economic consequences, gaps in research, health and health research systems, and community needs/demands ^[2].

PHASE 2

In the second phase, relevant stakeholders will be identified and invited to form a representative Working Group responsible for developing the agenda ^[2]. The stakeholders will include:

1. Chief Medical Officers/ Ministries of Health Representatives
2. Content Experts - Universities, Regional Health Institutions, Others
3. Non-Governmental Organizations and Community Representatives

PHASE 3

The third phase includes the use of Delphi Methodology to determine the priority areas for research. Delphi Methods can be defined as the use of an iterative process to achieve consensus or expert opinion where a problem does not permit the application of precise analytical techniques but can benefit from subjective judgment on a collective basis. In its simplest form, the method is anonymous, has controlled iteration and feedback and formal group judgment ^[5,6,7].

The Steps involved in the Delphi Methodology include ^[8]:

1. Development of the first round Delphi questionnaire
2. Transmission of the questionnaire to participants who would submit their responses (electronically).
3. Analysis of the 1st round of feedback.
4. Preparation of the second round questionnaire based on the 1st round and transmitting it to participants
5. Analysis of the second round of questionnaires.
6. Circulation of the results for final comments to participants as well as sharing them with other stakeholders using a comments forum on the website

The hosting of regular face-to-face meetings is not an option due to the costs involved. To circumvent this, the Delphi will be conducted using emails. The questionnaire will be sent to the stakeholders who will be asked to respond in two weeks. Participants will also have the option of

filling out the questionnaire online using survey monkey. In the first-round questionnaire, participants will be asked to list what they believe would be priority areas of research for each of the CCH III sub-priority areas in that particular Programme Area. For the second-round Delphi, the questionnaire will include a list of the research topics for each sub-priority area that was generated from the analysis of Delphi Round 1 questionnaires. Participants will then score each priority area identified.

Scoring and Ranking Research Priorities

During the second round of the Delphi, the research priorities identified by the above methods will be scored using the procedure stated in COHRED's Manual for Research Priority Setting Using the ENHR Strategy^[2].

This procedure involves the application of a list of criteria to each priority area identified. The scores will then be used to rank the areas^[3]. ***Participants will be asked to score each topic using the Council on Health Research Development (COHRED) "Criteria for Research Priority Setting-Mini Module" to assist with the scoring process***

Criteria for Research Priority Setting-Mini Module:

*Category 1: **Appropriateness** (as determined by)*

- *Ethical and moral issues*
- *Availability of pre existing data*

*Category 2: **Relevancy***

- *Equity focus and community concern/demand*
- *The burden of illness*

*Category 3: **Feasibility***

- *Capacity of the system to undertake the research*
- *Cost justification*

*Category 4: **Impact of Research Outcome***

- *Chances of implementation*
- *Overall reduction of burden, including cost*

PHASE 4

VALIDATION OF DRAFT AGENDAS

The draft Agendas for the Programme Areas will be posted on the CHRC website through Health Research Web (interactive platform powered by COHRED). Participants will be invited to visit the website and to post feedback and comment that will be used to validate the Agendas.

PHASE 5

IMPLEMENTATION^[2]

This phase includes the publication and dissemination of the Caribbean Health Research Agenda.

**We acknowledge there is a need for research problem specification within each research area, development of specific research questions and the identification of resources requirements, sources of funding and potential research groups for implementation. However, these issues will be addressed at a later time upon the availability of funds.*

PHASE 6

MONITORING AND EVALUATION^[2]

Relevant indicators will be identified/ developed to monitor the uptake and implementation of the agenda such as a review of the research topics funded and published. The indicators will be reviewed by the stakeholders involved in the development of the agenda.

The impact of the agenda on the conduct of essential research will be the subject of an independent review four (4) years after it has been developed. The findings will be used to revise the agenda.

TIMEFRAME

The process to develop the Agenda will begin in November 2009. At this time, research priorities will be developed for two of the eight CCH III Programme Areas – Food & Nutrition and Communicable Diseases. It is expected that a draft Agenda will be prepared for these Areas by May 2010. Three more Programme Areas (Chronic Non-Communicable Diseases, Strengthening Health Systems and Mental Health) will be then be addressed. The agenda for these are scheduled to be completed by the end of August. The final three CCH III Program Areas will then be addressed i.e. Environmental Health, Human Resource Development and Family and Community Health Services

It is expected that research priorities for all eight Programme Areas will be completed by November 30, 2010.

Phase 4 will be implemented for each of the Programme Areas as soon as their priorities have been determined.

References

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2. Okello D, Chongtrakul P: A Manual for Research Priority Setting using the ENHR Strategy [Online]. 2009 [cited 2009 Oct 1]. Available from URL: <http://www.cohred.org/node/22>
3. World Health Organization. World Report on Knowledge for Better Health, Strengthening Health Systems. 2004 [cited 2009 Oct 7]. Available from URL: http://www.who.int/rpc/meetings/en/world_report_on_knowledge_for_better_health2.pdf
4. Caribbean Health Research Council. Health Research Policy for the Caribbean. 2009. [cited 2009 October 10]. Available from URL: <http://www.chrc-caribbean.org/HealthResearchPolicy.php>
5. Delphi Methodology [Online]. 2009 [cited 2009 Oct 1]. Available from URL: <http://www.northumbria.ac.uk/static/5007/ceispdf/Delphimethod.pdf>
6. Dalkey N: The Delphi Methodology [Online]. 2009 [cited 2009 Oct 1]. Available from URL: <http://www.fernuni-hagen.de/ZIFF/v2-ch45a.htm>
7. Dalkey N: The Delphi Methodology [Online]. 2009 [cited 2009 Oct 1]. Available from URL: <http://www.fernuni-hagen.de/ZIFF/v2-ch45a.htm>
8. TJ, Helmer O, Dalkey N: The Delphi Method [Online]. 2009 [cited 2009 Oct 1]. Available from URL: http://www.12manage.com/methods_helmer_delphi_method.html#

APPENDIX - Tasks and Persons Responsible

Tasks	Persons Responsible
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Oversee and approve all processes involved in the development of the Caribbean Health Research Agenda 	Steering Committee
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Provide overall coordination of project development and implementation • Take lead role in interaction with stakeholders • Manage budget and financial matters 	Project Manager
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Assist in the identification of the relevant stakeholders in CARICOM member countries for each program area identified in Caribbean Cooperation in Health Initiative III (CCH III). • Guide the preparation of the background documents • Provide administrative support 	CHRC Secretariat
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Provide ongoing support throughout the process • Review the questionnaires for the Delphi Rounds. • Oversee the analysis of data retrieved from the Delphi and Wiki • Facilitate the meeting at which the process and draft agenda will be presented for review • Assist with set up the Wiki 	Council on Health for Research Development (COHRED)
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Identification/Preparation of the background documents for each program area defined in CCH III. • Recruitment of stakeholders and follow up when necessary. • Develop the questionnaires for use in the Delphi rounds. • Development of the Wiki. • Collate and analyze data retrieved from the Delphi and Wiki • Preparation of reports • Plan meeting of stakeholders 	Research Assistant