

2020

Universal Health and the Pandemic – Resilient Health Systems

Subregional Program
Office for the
Caribbean

PAHO



Pan American
Health
Organization



World Health
Organization
REGIONAL OFFICE FOR THE
Americas

**ANNUAL
REPORT**
—
2020



The Pan American Health Organization (PAHO) was founded in 1902 and is recognized as the independent specialized health agency of the inter-American system, under the Charter of the Organization of American States. In 1949, PAHO agreed to serve as the Regional Office for the Americas of the World Health Organization (WHO), a specialized agency of the United Nations system. Acting in its capacity as WHO’s Regional Office, PAHO participates actively in the United Nations Country Team, collaborating with other agencies, the funds and programmes of the United Nations system, and with the United Nations Resident Coordinator to contribute to the achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals at country level. For nearly 120 years, PAHO has developed recognized competence and expertise, providing technical cooperation to its Member States to fight communicable and noncommunicable diseases and their causes, to strengthen health systems, and to respond to emergencies and disasters throughout the Region of the Americas.

Given PAHO’s dual legal status and the difficulty of disaggregating PAHO from WHO activities, this Annual Report reflects both PAHO and WHO activities in the Americas as related to technical cooperation in 2020. Approximately 80% of PAHO’s technical cooperation in health in the Region of the Americas is funded by PAHO’s own quota and voluntary contributions, as an inter-American organization. The remaining 20% of PAHO’s integrated biennial budget includes WHO-funded activities. Further detailed financial information for this Annual Report can be found in the Financial Summary section.

Mission

To lead strategic collaborative efforts among Member States and other partners to promote equity in health, to combat disease, and to improve the quality of, and lengthen, the lives of the peoples of the Americas.

Vision

To be the major catalyst for ensuring that all the peoples of the Americas enjoy optimal health and contribute to the well-being of their families and communities.

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Values
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.

Table of Contents

Forewords	2
About Our Work	3
COVID-19 Response	4
Fostering Partnerships	6
Adolescent and Youth Health	9
Antimicrobial Resistance	10
CaribVET	11
Climate Change and Health	13
Communication and Community Engagement	16
Elimination Agenda	18
Human Resources for Health Development	19
Medicines and Health Technologies	21
Noncommunicable Diseases	22
Stronger Together Campaign	27
Financial Summary	30
Looking Ahead	35



Click on our pop-out cursor to find out more information on a particular topic.



Forewords



The year 2020 will be remembered as the year that tested everyone’s resilience. By December, in the Americas, more than 33 million people had been infected with COVID-19 and more than 800,000 persons had died. The devastating loss of life is accompanied by an economic downturn that continues to affect everyone and threatens to derail the achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals.

The year of the COVID-19 pandemic has shed light on inequities and the barriers to universal health. Some of them – low-paid work, the informal economy, overcrowded housing, lack of social protection, limited access to health services – have made vulnerable populations even more susceptible to COVID-19. The disease has exposed both the barriers to universal health and the profound need for it.

The pandemic has also demonstrated that the health sector acting alone cannot achieve universal health. We need leadership, good governance, the private sector, and civil society. Academia and industry must work with the government to produce and share technologies, including diagnostics, therapeutics, vaccines, as well as digital innovation. Development partners must facilitate coordination for disease surveillance, information sharing, and the response to health emergencies. Financial sectors must help make available the resources needed to ensure that health systems are adaptable, responsive, and inclusive while they address the needs of the entire population. The pandemic has irrefutably proved that we need everyone to be engaged for health and well-being that leaves no one behind.

This year, PAHO’s technical cooperation has focused not only on helping countries to respond to the pandemic but also on safeguarding progress toward universal health. This Annual Report reviews our contributions and achievements and reinforces PAHO’s core mission, through our focus on the country level, recognizing that progress toward sustainable development hinges on improved health at the local and national level.

Dr. Carissa F. Etienne
Director of the Pan American Health Organization



Caribbean countries have long understood that building resilience is a matter of the utmost importance. Vulnerability to exogenous shocks like hurricanes, climate change, and economic downturns has provided the region with valuable lessons on how to bounce back and on the importance of solidarity and partnership.

The COVID-19 pandemic has once again tested Caribbean resilience. The first case of COVID-19 was reported in the English-speaking Caribbean on March 1st, 2020. By March 30th, all countries in the subregion had reported at least one case of COVID-19. While still looking to meet the regular health needs of their populations, countries in the region faced the additional challenge of containing COVID-19, securing essential goods and services amidst a disrupted international supply chain system, and handling one of the most severe economic recessions in the history of the region. Early in the pandemic, Caribbean countries called for regional cooperation to face this storm. In this crisis, the region reaffirmed its commitment to health as a regional public good and its trust in Caribbean subregional mechanisms and institutions.

The PAHO Caribbean Subregional Program responds to this unique characteristic of the Caribbean and its architecture of small island developing states by collaborating closely with subregional institutions. The SPC supports and implements PAHO/WHO’s technical cooperation with the major subregional political integration mechanisms and institutions and serves as PAHO’s main interlocutor with the Caribbean Community (CARICOM).

Contributions from the Subregional Program aim to safeguard the advancements made in previous years toward universal health, while supporting the pandemic response. By brokering knowledge, facilitating key dialogues, mobilizing resources, and guiding policy development with technical expertise, the SPC complements PAHO country office efforts to improve and protect public health in the Caribbean.

Jessie Schutt-Aine
PAHO Subregional Program Coordinator, Caribbean

- Forewords
- About Our Work
- COVID-19 Response
- Fostering Partnerships
- Adolescent and Youth Health
- Antimicrobial Resistance
- CaribVET
- Climate Change and Health
- Communication and Community Engagement
- Elimination Agenda
- Human Resources for Health Development
- Medicines and Health Technologies
- Noncommunicable Diseases
- Stronger Together Campaign
- Financial Summary
- Looking Ahead

- Forewords
- **About Our Work**
- COVID-19 Response
- Fostering Partnerships
- Adolescent and Youth Health
- Antimicrobial Resistance
- CaribVET
- Climate Change and Health
- Communication and Community Engagement
- Elimination Agenda
- Human Resources for Health Development
- Medicines and Health Technologies
- Noncommunicable Diseases
- Stronger Together Campaign
- Financial Summary
- Looking Ahead

Our Approach

Our work is interprogrammatic, interdisciplinary, multisectoral, and multistakeholder. This interdisciplinary approach yields creativity, innovation, and dynamism in responding to subregional public health issues and makes for more effective use of resources.

In designing and implementing activities, we adopt an integrated society view to account for how diverse sectors and circumstances impact, and are impacted by, public health.

Our work aims to effect durable enhancements across all areas of Caribbean public health. While this report highlights our main achievements in 2020, our programs and activities are designed to be sustainable and have a long-term impact.



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About Our Work

Our work in the Caribbean for 2020 was guided by a Biennial Workplan (2020–2021), which is fully aligned with the outgoing Subregional Cooperation Strategy 2016–2019, the CARICOM Caribbean Cooperation in Health IV, and the PAHO Strategic Plan 2020–2025.

Our Technical Work Areas



Our Work Entails

- Forewords
- About Our Work
- COVID-19 Response
- Fostering Partnerships
- Adolescent and Youth Health
- Antimicrobial Resistance
- CaribVET
- Climate Change and Health
- Communication and Community Engagement
- Elimination Agenda
- Human Resources for Health Development
- Medicines and Health Technologies
- Noncommunicable Diseases
- Stronger Together Campaign
- Financial Summary
- Looking Ahead

PAHO supports countries in the surveillance, prevention, preparedness, and control of the COVID-19 pandemic by developing evidence-based strategies to predict, prevent, detect, and respond to infectious hazards.

In 2020, we realigned several vital areas of work and implemented COVID-19 measures and activities alongside our standard work program.

In keeping with our integrated, sustainable approach to Caribbean public health, many efforts deployed as part of our ongoing COVID-19 response contribute to the overall enhancement of public health regionally.

COVID-19 AND THE HIV ELIMINATION AGENDA

We advocated and promoted the implementation of essential services for HIV/STIs and sexual and reproductive health during the start of the pandemic. In 2020, PAHO monitored the regional supply of vaccines, medications for HIV/STIs and tuberculosis, and laboratory commodities for these infections in the Caribbean, to quickly determine the number of susceptible people in the population and to assist countries in closing gaps.



COVID-19 Response

Beyond incorporating COVID-19 response activities into our standard work program, some highlights of the SPC's efforts include:



Regional Procurement of Personal Protective Equipment (PPE)

SPC mobilized resources from the Caribbean Confederation of Credit Unions to secure 11,000 N95 respirators. This action ensured that healthcare workers in 15 Caribbean countries were better protected and better equipped to assist in the COVID-19 response.

Safer, Smarter Shelters – Caribbean Shelter Guide

The limited size of most of the subregion's shelters became a heightened challenge due to COVID-19 distancing requirements. As such, the number of people a shelter could safely accommodate during the hurricane season was further reduced. In response to this, the SPC led the production of the Caribbean Shelter Guide, which comprehensively details measures to be adopted per international emergency shelter protocols. Consideration was given to factors such as the spacing between beds/cots, recreation areas, and ventilation.

Strengthened Laboratory Capacity

SPC partnered with the Caribbean Public Health Agency (CARPHA) and the Caribbean MedLab Foundation to execute capacity development training in the use of equipment.

Guidance on Regional and International Travel

SPC provides ongoing technical guidance on the resumption of non-essential international travel in the Caribbean in the context of COVID-19 and in accordance with the International Health Regulations. PAHO's recommendations at Council for Human and Social Development (COHSOD) special emergency meetings informed the regional decision to reopen air and seaports in a collaborative and uniformed manner, guided by science-based protocols.



PAHO/WHO Working with Caribbean Countries to Ensure Effective Surveillance on the Safety of Future COVID-19 Vaccines

“We need to be prepared to introduce this life-saving technology in all countries and to do the corresponding safety surveillance. For this, countries will need to ensure that they have: guidelines and procedures in place to conduct vaccine pharmacovigilance activities, competent and trained staff to perform the vigilance activities, established coordination mechanisms between relevant stakeholders, and clear communication channels with regional and subregional partners, as well as with the public, to combat any misinformation on the vaccine’s safety that may lead to a vaccine hesitancy movement.”

*Jessie Schutt-Aine,
PAHO Subregional Program Coordinator, Caribbean*

- Forewords
- About Our Work
- COVID-19 Response
- **Fostering Partnerships**
- Adolescent and Youth Health
- Antimicrobial Resistance
- CaribVET
- Climate Change and Health
- Communication and Community Engagement
- Elimination Agenda
- Human Resources for Health Development
- Medicines and Health Technologies
- Noncommunicable Diseases
- Stronger Together Campaign
- Financial Summary
- Looking Ahead

Fostering Partnerships in the Caribbean through Leadership and Coordination

At the SPC, we aim to be a resourceful, strategic partner in advancing Caribbean public health. Alongside CARICOM, its various specialized agencies, and other regional organizations, our team of experts works assiduously to enhance Caribbean cooperation in health, governance, and coordination.

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As a key partner in the Caribbean Cooperation in Health Secretariat, alongside CARPHA and CARICOM, we steer the Caribbean Cooperation in Health Phase IV, which focuses on Regional Public Goods for Sustainable Development.

COVID-19

In response to the COVID-19 pandemic, our team continues to leverage our existing position as a subregional nexus for collaboration and cooperation to boost country-level coordination efforts. To date, we have developed, published, and disseminated dozens of evidence-based technical documents to help guide countries' pandemic management.

During the reporting period, PAHO was pleased to engage in the following CARICOM meetings:

5 CARICOM
Heads of
Government
Meetings

6 Emergency
Meetings
and 1 Regular
Meeting
of the COHSOD

8 Information
Sessions
of CARICOM
Chief Medical
Officers

2 CARPHA
Executive
Board
Meetings

1 World
Health
Assembly

Our scientific expertise, coordination strengths, and strategic positioning as a nexus between PAHO/WHO, CARICOM, and Caribbean countries proved extremely useful.

- Forewords
- About Our Work
- COVID-19 Response
- **Fostering Partnerships**
- Adolescent and Youth Health
- Antimicrobial Resistance
- CaribVET
- Climate Change and Health
- Communication and Community Engagement
- Elimination Agenda
- Human Resources for Health Development
- Medicines and Health Technologies
- Noncommunicable Diseases
- Stronger Together Campaign
- Financial Summary
- Looking Ahead



Fostering Partnerships in the Caribbean through Leadership and Coordination

Significant outcomes from our leadership and governance efforts:

COVAX Facility

The COVAX Facility invests in the global manufacture and expansion of approved COVID-19 vaccine candidates, intending to secure 2 billion vaccine doses by 2021. The Subregional Office, in partnership with CARPHA, and funded by the European Union (EU), has spearheaded CARICOM States' registration and participation in the COVAX Facility. Member States will purchase successful vaccines through the PAHO Revolving Fund. Ten CARICOM countries and territories have committed to the COVAX Facility as of January 2021.

The COVAX Facility aims to ensure fair and equitable access to safe vaccines when international regulators approve them. Caribbean countries expect to receive COVID-19 vaccines through the COVAX Facility to cover up to 20% of their population by 31 December 2021.

CARICOM Pooled Procurement Mechanism

At the meeting of CARICOM Heads of Government, the need to pool procurement of medical devices was formally recognized. PAHO, in partnership with CARICOM and the Caribbean Disaster Emergency Management Agency (CDEMA),

spearheaded the development of a procurement protocol for consolidating purchases subregionally. PAHO supported the advancement of the specialized procurement protocol at the 10th Special Emergency Meeting of Heads of Government on 5 May 2020, where it was approved.

Regional Coordination Mechanism

In response to the novel coronavirus, CDEMA established a Core Coordination Cell for Health, with PAHO, CARPHA, and the CARICOM Secretariat as the principal actors to consolidate resources, harmonize, and coordinate a regional response to COVID-19.





On the Caribbean Roadmap for Adolescent and Youth Health

“I want to thank PAHO/WHO, CARICOM, and United Nations partners for their leadership in this process. I urge you to continue the advocacy for political prioritization and the integration of these recommendations into national development plans. While the challenges before us are compounded by COVID-19, we have an opportunity of using this Roadmap to usher future generations into a cleaner and healthier Caribbean. Can we do it? Yes, we can!”

*Dr. Frank Anthony,
Minister of Health,
Guyana*

Inaugural Adolescent Pregnancy Prevention Week in the Caribbean, 18–24 October 2020

In partnership with youth, adolescents, and civil society organizations, SPC led the subregion's first-ever observance of Adolescent Pregnancy Prevention Week and the implementation of the inaugural Youth Connect and Technical Forum. Led by youth advocates, the Forum raised awareness on adolescent pregnancy prevention and raised visibility around recommended actions at both regional and local levels.

The Adolescent Pregnancy Prevention Week observance is an activity implemented as part of the Roadmap, “Championing Our Wealth: Promoting the Health and Well-Being of Adolescents and Youth in the Caribbean.”



Roadmap for Adolescent and Youth Health

PAHO partnered with 20 regional and international youth groups and organizations, including CARICOM Youth Ambassadors and Caribbean Youth Regional Council, to spearhead a roadmap for adolescent and youth health in the Caribbean. For example, the newly implemented project “Strengthening Climate Resilient Health Systems in the Caribbean” has utilized the roadmap as a framework for engaging youth.



- Forewords
- About Our Work
- COVID-19 Response
- Fostering Partnerships
- Adolescent and Youth Health
- Antimicrobial Resistance
- CaribVET
- Climate Change and Health
- Communication and Community Engagement
- Elimination Agenda
- Human Resources for Health Development
- Medicines and Health Technologies
- Noncommunicable Diseases
- Stronger Together Campaign
- Financial Summary
- Looking Ahead

- Forewords
- About Our Work
- COVID-19 Response
- Fostering Partnerships
- Adolescent and Youth Health
- **Antimicrobial Resistance**
- CaribVET
- Climate Change and Health
- Communication and Community Engagement
- Elimination Agenda
- Human Resources for Health Development
- Medicines and Health Technologies
- Noncommunicable Diseases
- Stronger Together Campaign
- Financial Summary
- Looking Ahead

Antimicrobial Resistance

We continue to coordinate the implementation of a two-year Cooperation among Countries for Health Development (CCHD) on antimicrobial resistance (AMR) detection and surveillance capacity in CARICOM Member States. This project has allowed for the development of a laboratory network for AMR detection and monitoring in the Caribbean and catalyses valuable South-South cooperation.

Baseline Assessments

Country visits to Barbados, Guyana, Jamaica, Suriname, and Trinidad and Tobago were conducted to carry out baseline assessments of capacity and to identify the specific supply and training needs of each country.

Enhanced Laboratory Quality

In order to strengthen the quality of samples received from regional laboratories, health care workers in Barbados, Guyana, and six Organisation of Eastern Caribbean States (OECS) countries were trained in sample collection.

Laboratory supplies were purchased and distributed to CARICOM Member States.

All Caribbean countries and territories have signed up to external Quality Assurance Programs through which labs are compared against external standards. Several countries are also expanding their data collection efforts in a bid to conform to WHONET and Global Antimicrobial Resistance Surveillance System (GLASS) databases.

Antimicrobial Resistance

Training

- Two laboratory technologists from Barbados participated in a four-week internship in Argentina where they were trained in identifying AMR, ensuring systems to safeguard the quality of testing, analysing data and producing reports, and using that knowledge to inform prescribing practices and treatment protocols.
- Health professionals from veterinary laboratories in Barbados, Guyana, Jamaica, and Suriname visited Argentina for one week of training and mentorship in AMR diagnostics.
- Routine AMR virtual sessions were conducted at least every two months, with the Caribbean AMR National Focal Points engaged in monitoring and evaluation of the development and implementation of AMR national action plans, AMR-relevant updates, etc.

Achievements

- Eight human health laboratories, one CARPHA laboratory, two food laboratories, and three veterinary laboratories in CARICOM Member States were assessed for capacity to detect AMR.
- Eight professionals from veterinary laboratories in CARICOM Member States were trained in SENASA laboratory, Argentina.
- More than 300 professionals from seven Caribbean countries were trained in sample-taking and received the training material, including nurses, physicians, and laboratory experts.
- Nine Caribbean countries received supplies, reagents, and a quick guide to detect resistance mechanisms of clinical impact.
- Nine laboratories in CARICOM Member States are participating in an External Quality Assessment Program.

- Forewords
- About Our Work
- COVID-19 Response
- Fostering Partnerships
- Adolescent and Youth Health
- Antimicrobial Resistance
- **CaribVET**
- Climate Change and Health
- Communication and Community Engagement
- Elimination Agenda
- Human Resources for Health Development
- Medicines and Health Technologies
- Noncommunicable Diseases
- Stronger Together Campaign
- Financial Summary
- Looking Ahead



CaribVET

The Caribbean Animal Health Network (CaribVET) is a collaborative network involving official veterinary services across 34 Caribbean countries and territories, and regional and international partners. PAHO participates in this network as a regional organization to address veterinary public health. This collaborative effort reflects PAHO's "One Health" commitment to integrating all aspects of public health: animal, human, and the environment.



Since late 2019, the Pan American Center for Foot and Mouth Disease and Veterinary Public Health (PANAFTOSA/VPH-PAHO/WHO) has participated in CaribVET activities in collaboration with the subregional program.

During 2020, PAHO was represented at the CaribVET 15th Steering Committee and the CaribVET 1st Extraordinary General Assembly

meetings, organized virtually during May and November, respectively.

Additionally, PANAFTOSA/VPH-PAHO/WHO has participated and provided technical inputs to several webinars organized by the network, related to COVID-19 in animals, the role of the veterinary sector in the COVID-19 pandemic response, as well as regularly scheduled meetings addressing the

Caribbean Wildlife Trade, Border Security, Money Laundering Initiative in the subregion.

PANAFTOSA/VPH-PAHO/WHO also provided technical inputs for reviewing the CaribGREEN project prior to submission to the French Cooperation, which includes a component on disease surveillance, within the framework of One Health.



PAHO Launches a Multidisciplinary Climate Change and Health Initiative

"We are at a crucial point in time in the Americas when we must increase our solidarity and intergovernmental collaboration to address climate issues, which are arguably the health challenges of the century... The project supports a cadre of new climate and health leaders... It promotes evidence for the frequently hidden health co-benefits of climate action and supports the implementation of health-related plans and resources for mitigation and adaptation for health."

Dr. Carissa F. Etienne
Director of the Pan American Health Organization

Climate Change and Health

- Forewords
- About Our Work
- COVID-19 Response
- Fostering Partnerships
- Adolescent and Youth Health
- Antimicrobial Resistance
- CaribVET
- **Climate Change and Health**
- Communication and Community Engagement
- Elimination Agenda
- Human Resources for Health Development
- Medicines and Health Technologies
- Noncommunicable Diseases
- Stronger Together Campaign
- Financial Summary
- Looking Ahead

EMPOWERING CARIBBEAN
ACTION FOR CLIMATE AND HEALTH



#ClimateHealthAction


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All categorized as small island developing states, the subregional Caribbean countries are more vulnerable to the effects of climate change. Less discussed, however, is the impact of climate change on public health. PAHO continues to play a pivotal role in increasing awareness and facilitating action on Climate Change and Health. Key Climate Change and Health initiatives are being undertaken through the European Union/CARIFORUM (CARICOM plus the Dominican Republic) project Strengthening Climate Resilient Health Systems in the Caribbean. This project provides an interdisciplinary and multisectoral approach by integrating health and non-health ministries and organizations into a dynamic network of subregional partners.

EU/CARIFORUM Climate Change and Health Project

This project supports national and subregional efforts to increase climate and health mitigation and adaptation efforts, thereby also supporting efforts to

address the environmental determinants of health. This includes piloting tools to determine the health-related co-benefits of climate mitigation; increasing the development and implementation of health adaptation plans across the subregion; developing novel early warning surveillance systems that integrate health and climate data; and forming a cadre of trained climate and health leaders in the Caribbean. This project is complementary to other PAHO-led climate and health actions in the Caribbean and includes a significant emphasis on communication to key target groups.

 A high-level launch event was held, including the Director of PAHO, the EU Ambassador, and the leaders of subregional integration mechanisms from Central America, South America, and the Caribbean.

Climate Change and Health

- Forewords
- About Our Work
- COVID-19 Response
- Fostering Partnerships
- Adolescent and Youth Health
- Antimicrobial Resistance
- CaribVET
- Climate Change and Health
- Communication and Community Engagement
- Elimination Agenda
- Human Resources for Health Development
- Medicines and Health Technologies
- Noncommunicable Diseases
- Stronger Together Campaign
- Financial Summary
- Looking Ahead

Since 2020, real progress has been made to boost country-level awareness and regional coordination through:

2 launch events May 2020 and December 2020 with representation from CARIFORUM and the EU	5 signed legal contribution agreements, formalizing partner relationships
2 EU Climate and Health partner orientation and dialogues	4 Awareness building sessions for the PAHO Climate Change Focal Points
16 health ministry officials from all Member Countries	1 Steering Committee formed and 1 meeting held
2 Climate and Health advisory groups	

Additionally, four technical working groups consisting of members of all partner organizations continue to meet monthly. These working groups are aligned with the priority work areas as follows:

- Climate and Health Co-Benefits and Health National Adaptation Plans – led by PAHO and the Caribbean Community Climate Change Centre with support from St. George's University.
 - Early Warning Systems and Novel Tools for Climate Forecasting – led by CARPHA and the Caribbean Institute for Meteorology and Hydrology.
 - Water Safety, Climate Resilient Water and Sanitation Plans – led by CARPHA and PAHO with support from FAO and UNEP.
 - Climate Health Leadership (fellows, youth, and health authority programs) – led by CARICOM, University of the West Indies (UWI), and PAHO, with support from UNICEF.
- Effective communication and visibility are an integral aspect of Climate Change and Health activities. Strategic public engagement efforts include:
- Integration of youth component through a Climate and Health Youth Action Plan. CARICOM Youth Ambassadors, UNICEF, and other actors were engaged to encourage youth advocacy.
 - Targeted outreach to key populations through an awareness video and jingle on the project and engagement of social media influencers, as well as the production of brochures on climate and health.
 - Development of a survey to benchmark public perception of climate change impacts on health, to be disseminated in 2021.
 - Plans to train journalists on evidenced-based health communications to engender accuracy and more informative reporting on this technical subject.
 - Boosted partner and stakeholder engagement through the development and distribution of a biannual climate change and health newsletter and press releases.

- Forewords
- About Our Work
- COVID-19 Response
- Fostering Partnerships
- Adolescent and Youth Health
- Antimicrobial Resistance
- CaribVET
- **Climate Change and Health**
- Communication and Community Engagement
- Elimination Agenda
- Human Resources for Health Development
- Medicines and Health Technologies
- Noncommunicable Diseases
- Stronger Together Campaign
- Financial Summary
- Looking Ahead

Climate Change and Health

Health National Adaptation Plans

Health National Adaptation Plans (HNAPs) are critical to integrating climate change adaptation into health planning. PAHO and the Caribbean Community Climate Change Centre lead the drive to develop HNAPs regionally. In 2020, the SPC finalized the first three countries (the Bahamas, Grenada, and Saint Lucia) to receive support in developing HNAPs.

One hundred persons, including representatives from 15 regional ministries of health and 12 other organizations, participated in an EU-CARIFORUM HNAP Workshop. The session, "Advancing the Development of HNAPs – Prioritizing and Addressing the Impacts of Climate Change in the Caribbean" improved understanding of new criteria, barriers, and enabling factors. It also boosted information sharing on each country's accomplishments in integrating health and climate measures to date.

One Health Climate and Health Leadership

The One Health Climate and Health Fellow Leadership Institute, managed by UWI St. Augustine, has been established, and recruitment of the first cohort of fellows is currently underway. The program directly addresses climate and health leadership for Climate Change and Health in the Caribbean. An interdisciplinary group of individuals between the ages of 25 and 45 from each Member Country will benefit from participating in a dynamic one-year fellowship program. CARICOM is currently recruiting youth ambassadors who will undergo training in climate and health as well as the implementation of community projects.

COVID-19

COVID-19-specific initiatives have been integrated into the broader climate change work program. Ongoing areas of work include:



- Training of multisectoral and interdisciplinary groups including health, environment, and climate professionals on the prevention and control of COVID-19.



- Development and dissemination of health communication strategies to augment the Caribbean public's understanding of COVID-19 and prevention measures.



- Public communication materials such as a video on the importance of water conservation while handwashing for COVID-19 produced in Spanish.

Communication and Community Engagement

Innovative communication and community engagement efforts were deployed to disseminate evidence-based information. These communication materials were shared across various social media channels, thereby amplifying the reach and impact.

COVID-19

Webinars

In collaboration with regional partners such as the Pan Caribbean Partnership against HIV/AIDS (PANCAP), a series of webinars was organized to raise awareness and provide practical, timely and relevant information to the Caribbean population on a wide range of topics related to COVID-19.

98.5% of respondents to post-webinar surveys indicated their knowledge was enhanced; 95% believed they will use the knowledge gained in their day-to-day work activities

Public Communication Video – Highlights



COVID-19 Dashboard

The SPC maintains an interactive COVID-19 Dashboard, which provides up-to-date statistical information regarding the COVID-19 situation in CARICOM Member States and associated Member States. This Dashboard increases public awareness and bolsters national surveillance systems.



PAHO Caribbean Social Media Engagement:



2,000,000+
people reached
on Facebook weekly



35,000+ people
reached on Twitter
weekly

- Forewords
- About Our Work
- COVID-19 Response
- Fostering Partnerships
- Adolescent and Youth Health
- Antimicrobial Resistance
- CaribVET
- Climate Change and Health
- Communication and Community Engagement
- Elimination Agenda
- Human Resources for Health Development
- Medicines and Health Technologies
- Noncommunicable Diseases
- Stronger Together Campaign
- Financial Summary
- Looking Ahead

- Forewords
- About Our Work
- COVID-19 Response
- Fostering Partnerships
- Adolescent and Youth Health
- Antimicrobial Resistance
- CaribVET
- Climate Change and Health
- Communication and Community Engagement
- Elimination Agenda
- Human Resources for Health Development
- Medicines and Health Technologies
- Noncommunicable Diseases
- Stronger Together Campaign
- Financial Summary
- Looking Ahead

Capacity Development

A collaboration with the Caribbean Development Bank (CDB) and the Caribbean Broadcasting Union (CBU), this training for journalists and communicators embodies the multistakeholder, interprogrammatic approach to addressing Caribbean public health.



Journalist Training

In collaboration with CDB and CBU, the SPC coordinated four virtual sessions targeting journalists and communicators. The training covered responsible reporting during the COVID-19 pandemic, with a focus on key epidemiological concepts, mental health and psychosocial support considerations, domestic violence, self-care, and stress management. The training involved 337 participants, and the recordings of the sessions have received 1,153 views. The contents of this training series have served as the basis to produce a self-learning course in the PAHO Virtual Campus for Public Health (VCPH) "Evidence-Based Solutions Journalism for Health" that will be launched in 2021.

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- Forewords
- About Our Work
- COVID-19 Response
- Fostering Partnerships
- Adolescent and Youth Health
- Antimicrobial Resistance
- CaribVET
- Climate Change and Health
- Communication and Community Engagement
- **Elimination Agenda**
- Human Resources for Health Development
- Medicines and Health Technologies
- Noncommunicable Diseases
- Stronger Together Campaign
- Financial Summary
- Looking Ahead



Elimination Agenda



Combating communicable diseases constitutes a substantial aspect of PAHO's long-term subregional efforts. Using existing tools and technology, the initiative overarchingly seeks to eliminate specific communicable diseases that impose a significant epidemiological burden. The subregional office supports the elimination agenda by contributing to technical guidance, policy development, and implementation through direct technical cooperation, advocacy, sensitization, and programming.

Our efforts have strengthened countries' capacity to respond to various communicable diseases, such as tuberculosis, HIV, and other sexually transmitted infections (STIs). The reduction of new HIV infections in the Caribbean is a testament to the joint planning and programming between PAHO and regional partners such as PANCAP, UNAIDS, Caribbean MedLab Foundation (CMLF), U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), and PEPFAR, among others.

Elimination of the Mother-to-Child Transmission of HIV, Syphilis, and Hepatitis B (EMTCT Plus)

The Commonwealth of Dominica was certified by WHO as having eliminated the mother-to-child transmission of HIV and syphilis, a status shared with Anguilla, Antigua and Barbuda, Bermuda, Cuba, Cayman Islands, Montserrat, and Saint Kitts and Nevis. The SPC provided technical guidance and support for the advancement of national EMTCT reports (including the revision of epidemiological data and primary prevention and treatment services) for Dominica, and coordinated a virtual assessment and in-country mission by the Regional Validation Team in support of the country's validation. The validation was approved by the PAHO Regional Validation Committee.

In 2020, the SPC supported Member States' efforts to strengthen primary prevention services and surveillance for HIV, syphilis, and hepatitis B within the framework of Maternal and Child Health Services (MCH). In 2020, 12 Member States and territories in the Caribbean introduced the birth dose, one of the primary indicators to advance toward the EMTCT targets for hepatitis B. The goal of the EMTCT strategy is to ensure that mother-to-child transmission of HIV, syphilis, and hepatitis B is prevented or reduced to a very low level.

Accelerate Progress Toward Ending AIDS

Over the years, the implementation of high-impact, evidence-based interventions for HIV prevention has been delayed in the Caribbean. Through ongoing advocacy with regional partners, several advances were made in 2020.

PAHO, in collaboration with Caribbean MedLab Foundation, supported the OECS and PANCAP toward a successful Global Fund grant for the roll-out and implementation of HIV self-testing (HIVST) in the Caribbean. The full implementation of HIVST will ensure the availability of an alternative HIV testing strategy, especially during the pandemic, and scale up testing for hard-to-reach populations.

Pre-exposure Prophylaxis (PrEP)

PrEP services for key populations were established in Guyana and Jamaica. In order to support other Caribbean countries to advance, PAHO conducted virtual trainings on the generic guidelines for pre-exposure and post-exposure prophylaxis, which are based on WHO recommendations, and supported the development of action plans to guide the implementation process.

Human Resources for Health Development



Developing human resources for health (HRH) that are appropriate, available, and qualified to meet the population's health needs and the national health systems' requirements is fundamental to achieving universal health. We have initiated several measures to improve HRH policy and procedures and train professionals directly.

Strengthen and Consolidate Governance and Leadership in HRH

The COHSOD approved an HRH Action Task Force for the Caribbean in November 2020. Under the coordination of CARICOM and PAHO Secretariat, the task force will focus on two initial priorities: impact of COVID-19 and HRH and migration of healthcare workers.

The SPC supported four PAHO country offices in the development of national policies, including the HRH Policy and Plan of Action for Barbados; the National Health Strategy 2021–2030 of Guyana (HRH component); the draft HRH Incentive Plan for The Bahamas; and the National Training Plan of Belize.

Capacity Development in Human Resources for Health

The SPC supported a Caribbean cohort of 35 nurses from Antigua and Barbuda, Barbados, Belize, Dominica, Guyana, and Suriname to access specialized training in critical care nursing. This initiative was made possible through a collaboration with the UWI, Faculty of Medical Sciences, to deliver the Introductory Course in Critical Care Nursing.

Virtual Campus for Public Health

The Caribbean Node of the VCPH facilitates the delivery of highly relevant, targeted training and information to Caribbean health professionals and the general public. In March 2020, expansion of the Caribbean Node included a section on Information and Capacity Building Resources for COVID-19, which provides advice to the general public on the pandemic and COVID-19 technical guidance.

The COVID-19 section includes 15 COVID-19 virtual OpenWHO courses (including three courses

recently translated to Dutch by PAHO-Suriname), 10 PAHO webinars on COVID-19 topics for the Subregion, two country case studies and lessons learned, links to PAHO and WHO situation reports, latest research, technical guidance, communication materials, and other resources produced by the Organization.

**In 2020, the Caribbean Node:
Facilitated 7,000 sessions;
Engaged 4,000 users;
84% of users were first time users of the platform.**

- Forewords
- About Our Work
- COVID-19 Response
- Fostering Partnerships
- Adolescent and Youth Health
- Antimicrobial Resistance
- CaribVET
- Climate Change and Health
- Communication and Community Engagement
- Elimination Agenda
- **Human Resources for Health Development**
- Medicines and Health Technologies
- Noncommunicable Diseases
- Stronger Together Campaign
- Financial Summary
- Looking Ahead

- Forewords
- About Our Work
- COVID-19 Response
- Fostering Partnerships
- Adolescent and Youth Health
- Antimicrobial Resistance
- CaribVET
- Climate Change and Health
- Communication and Community Engagement
- Elimination Agenda
- Human Resources for Health Development
- Medicines and Health Technologies
- Noncommunicable Diseases
- Stronger Together Campaign
- Financial Summary
- Looking Ahead

Virtual Campus for Public Health Impact

Human resource capacity in areas such as epidemiology and surveillance (core capacities under the International Health Regulations) and public health leadership were strengthened through the delivery of more than 20 online facilitator-led courses delivered via the PAHO Virtual Campus. One such course was offered in partnership with NextGenU, focused on Public Health Leadership: Leading the health sector during COVID-19 and beyond.

87 Basic Epidemiology (2 courses) – 87 participants from 17 countries and territories completed these courses

68 Advanced Epidemiology course – 68 participants from 18 countries and territories completed this course

23 Surveillance course – 23 participants from 6 countries and territories completed this course

51 Public Health Leadership – 51 participants from 11 countries and territories completed this course



Virtual Campus for Public Health Impact



Further critical training was provided to **70 head radiologists, medical physicists, and radiographers of English-speaking Caribbean countries** via a webinar on the role of imaging for diagnosis and for monitoring the clinical course of patients with COVID-19, as well as current infection prevention and control practices of radiology departments to reduce cross-infection and protect medical professionals and patients.

● **The SPC partnered with the education sector to respond to the needs of health systems.** The SPC and the UWI agreed on a list of courses and resources to develop a Diploma and Certificate in Health Policy and Health Systems. The program will launch in June 2021.

The SPC and the Health Economics Unit at PAHO Headquarters supported the revision and updating of the Health Economics course at UWI.

● **Health Workforce (HWF) Estimator** 

The HWF Estimator is a tool developed by WHO that allows planners in units, regions, or ministries to estimate workforce requirements, HWF shortage, and HWF over-supply, to better prepare for surges in infections.

The SPC continues to provide support to countries interested in using the Estimator Tool.

With facilitation support from WHO and Intrahealth International, two webinars were held in August and September 2020. HSS advisors from five countries participated in the first webinar, while the HSS advisor and 65 health officials from Jamaica participated in the second.

- Forewords
- About Our Work
- COVID-19 Response
- Fostering Partnerships
- Adolescent and Youth Health
- Antimicrobial Resistance
- CaribVET
- Climate Change and Health
- Communication and Community Engagement
- Elimination Agenda
- Human Resources for Health Development

● Medicines and Health Technologies

- Noncommunicable Diseases
- Stronger Together Campaign
- Financial Summary
- Looking Ahead



December 2016 saw the development of the Caribbean Regulatory System (CRS). It is a subregional mechanism housed under CARPHA and supported by several partners, including the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation, PAHO, and WHO. The CRS supports Member States' marketing authorization functions by reviewing and recommending medicines and other health technologies. It does this by using competencies, such as regulatory reliance on assessments by reference authorities, focusing on essential drugs, to enable a sustainable enterprise in small states' resource-constrained environment.

With PAHO's support, in 2020, the CRS reached an important landmark in its development as it recommended its 100th product and its first therapeutic for a rare disease (Satralizumab).

PAHO and CARPHA signed an agreement enabling the PAHO Strategic Fund to share non-public information related to medicines and biologics for the CRS' evaluations.

In addition to promoting country-uptake of the CRS, the SPC also supported VigiCarib, the CRS pharmacovigilance arm. VigiCarib is a voluntary system enabling countries to report medicine-related adverse events and substandard and falsified products.

Medicines and Health Technologies



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In 2020, 66 case reports of adverse drug reactions and 33 suspected substandard products were shared with the network for pharmacovigilance and post-market surveillance through VigiCarib.

Further, two COVID-19 test kits were recommended. (Lab Gun COVID-19 RT-PCR Kit and Sensiva Corneum PCR Molecular Laboratory Developed COVID-19 Test).

Medicines Quality Training Series

The SPC supported CARPHA's Medicines Unit to engage technical teams from the United States Pharmacopeia (USP) to provide training for CARICOM countries on dossier review and risk-based post-market surveillance of the quality of medicines in November and December 2020. More than 70 individuals benefited from specialized training on pre-market authorization, while more than 50 professionals were trained on post-market surveillance.

The sessions will significantly improve market authorization registration, procurement, and post-market surveillance processes and ultimately enhance the quality of medicines used throughout the subregion.

COVID-19

For the COVID-19 response, the SPC supported the CRS in the development of its emergency use pathway. As a result, there was a shortening of the review processes to approve medicines and other medical products from 60 to 30 days.

Preparing for Vaccine Safety

The SPC is proactively preparing the region for the arrival of the COVID-19 vaccines. In November 2020, the SPC and CARPHA hosted a webinar "Preparing for COVID-19 Vaccine Safety Surveillance in the Caribbean." More than 180 public health professionals from immunization programs and regulators from 20 Caribbean countries and territories participated in the event.

Such sessions are critical to ensuring subregional preparedness for handling COVID-19 vaccines when they are market-ready.

The SPC actively sensitizes and trains Caribbean countries on the Vaccine Readiness Assessment tool, which WHO and UNICEF developed. This tool provides an essential roadmap for governments to plan and prepare to introduce a COVID-19 vaccine. It allows countries to self-assess their readiness against key targets.

YOU CAN ACCESS THE TOOL HERE



- Forewords
- About Our Work
- COVID-19 Response
- Fostering Partnerships
- Adolescent and Youth Health
- Antimicrobial Resistance
- CaribVET
- Climate Change and Health
- Communication and Community Engagement
- Elimination Agenda
- Human Resources for Health Development
- Medicines and Health Technologies
- Noncommunicable Diseases
- Stronger Together Campaign
- Financial Summary
- Looking Ahead

Noncommunicable Diseases


Prevention and control of noncommunicable diseases (NCDs) and their risk factors is a priority work area for PAHO. The need to address NCDs has become even more evident during the COVID-19 pandemic, as NCDs increase the risk of severe COVID-19 and death. A summary of the important achievements is provided below.

Strengthening the Collaboration with Civil Society

SPC is collaborating with the Healthy Caribbean Coalition to support their efforts to accelerate action for NCD prevention and control, both at the national and regional levels. Crucial areas of work include protecting public health policy from conflict of interest; communication and advocacy initiatives, with a focus on nutrition policies; and efforts to explore the experiences of people living with NCDs during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Addressing NCDs through the Use of Law

In March 2020, PAHO and the International Legal Consortium (ILC) from the Campaign for Tobacco-Free Kids (CTFK), with support from the European Union, convened the Subregional Workshop on the Use of Law to address NCDs in the Caribbean. This event's primary outcome was the decision to establish a Caribbean Public Health Law Forum, which will bring together public health and legal officers. This Forum, an important regional public good, is being jointly developed by PAHO and the Caribbean Court of Justice Academy for Law. This initiative paves the way for more significant work at country level. It will be formally launched during the first quarter of 2021.



Prevention and control of noncommunicable diseases (NCDs) and their risk factors is a priority work area for PAHO.

- Forewords
- About Our Work
- COVID-19 Response
- Fostering Partnerships
- Adolescent and Youth Health
- Antimicrobial Resistance
- CaribVET
- Climate Change and Health
- Communication and Community Engagement
- Elimination Agenda
- Human Resources for Health Development
- Medicines and Health Technologies
- **Noncommunicable Diseases**
- Stronger Together Campaign
- Financial Summary
- Looking Ahead

Noncommunicable Diseases

Effective Front-of-Package Warning Labels (FOPWL)

To date, the Caribbean population still does not have access to clear information on whether a product is excessive in free sugars, total fats, saturated fats, trans fats, and sodium. To address this, the CARICOM Regional Organisation for Standards and Quality (CROSQ) is undertaking the revision of the CARICOM Regional Standard for Specification for labelling of pre-packaged foods (CRS 5:2010) to incorporate FOPWL specifications. A revision of the standard was initiated in 2018. The current draft meets the highest level of scientific excellence, including the octagon-shaped warning system and a nutrient profile model that meets the WHO's dietary recommendations.

PAHO has provided technical cooperation to support the FOPWL standard development process, which has benefited from a Cooperation among Countries for Health Development project between Chile and CARICOM. This South–South collaboration facilitated by PAHO has leveraged Chile's experience in developing and implementing a comprehensive law to address obesogenic environments, including FOPWL, restriction of marketing to children, and limitation of the sale of unhealthy products in schools.



Effective Front-of-Package Warning Labels (FOPWL)

- Forewords
- About Our Work
- COVID-19 Response
- Fostering Partnerships
- Adolescent and Youth Health
- Antimicrobial Resistance
- CaribVET
- Climate Change and Health
- Communication and Community Engagement
- Elimination Agenda
- Human Resources for Health Development
- Medicines and Health Technologies
- **Noncommunicable Diseases**
- Stronger Together Campaign
- Financial Summary
- Looking Ahead

Noncommunicable Diseases

Effective Front-of-Package Warning Labels (FOPWL)

PAHO has also contributed to information sharing and coalition-building among public health allies, including more recently through a webinar on FOPWL as a human rights issue, convened in collaboration with CARPHA, UWI, the Healthy Caribbean Coalition, and the O'Neill Institute. Some 247 participants from 37 countries, including 18 Caribbean countries and territories, attended the webinar, which featured high-level participants, including Sir George Alleyne, PAHO Director Emeritus; Anand Grover, Former United Nations Rapporteur on Human Rights; the United Nations Resident Coordinator for the Eastern Caribbean; and CARICOM Assistant Secretary General Douglas Slater. This event triggered renewed visibility and momentum for the FOPWL issue. The finalization and implementation of the FOWPL standard will be a critical contribution to address overweight and obesity in the Caribbean and empower Caribbean people with the tools to lead healthier lives.

Tobacco Control

Efforts to accelerate CARICOM pledge for a Smoke-free Caribbean by 2022

With a mandate by the CARICOM Heads of Government to have a Smoke-free Caribbean by 2022, the SPC is executing a grant from The Union to accelerate the implementation of the WHO Framework Convention for Tobacco Control (FCTC). As part of this grant, PAHO is supporting subregional capacity-development efforts for effective tobacco control legislation. This includes the development of virtual curricula for tobacco control legislation in the PAHO VCPH; development of research on the economic impact of smoke-free environments on tourism; direct technical cooperation to Member States for the development of WHO FCTC compliant tobacco control legislation, and case studies, among other activities.

The tobacco industry is targeting

a new generation

Speak out. #TobaccoExposed

With a mandate by the CARICOM Heads of Government to have a Smoke-free Caribbean by 2022, the SPC is executing a grant from The Union to accelerate the implementation of the WHO Framework Convention for Tobacco Control (FCTC).



Front-of-Package Warning Labels

“It is the right of every child to have access to the highest attainable standard of health and we are simply not ensuring that they have access to that. When we look at systems, where in the Caribbean, we have major gaps in protecting our children in the food and nutrition system. We don’t have mandatory front of package labelling. We don’t have increased taxes on sugar-sweetened beverages. And, within our schools, we don’t have proper legislation and policies in place to protect our children to ensure that they have healthy and nutritious meals.”

*Pierre Cooke Jr.,
Youth Voices Technical Advisor,
Healthy Caribbean Coalition*

PAUSE FOR A MOMENT

A story of resilience and perseverance from the field

The full length article is
available on the PAHO website.



Championing Mental Health Awareness during the COVID-19 Pandemic



**Dr. Dev
Persaud**

Over the last year, thousands of Caribbean healthcare workers have become all too familiar with the personal and professional challenges and sacrifices in facing COVID-19. One such frontline worker is Dr. Dev Persaud – one of 75 Guyanese medical workers who participated in mental health and psychosocial support (MHPSS) training. Planned by the Ministry of Health, the regionwide initiative was implemented in collaboration with PAHO and the Caribbean Development Bank (CDB).

This accomplished medical registrar, who is responsible for one of the teams managing patients in the COVID-19 ICU, tent hospital, and transition ward, is a seasoned internal medicine and infectious diseases specialist. According to him, one of the challenges that healthcare workers have encountered while working on the frontline during the pandemic is managing the expectations of patients' families.

For a period of two weeks in late 2020, Dr. Persaud took part in the PAHO/CDB self-learning course Psychological First Aid in Disaster Management in the Caribbean. With the guiding principles of “look, listen, and link,” participants in the training session were sensitized to activating a number of skills. Such proficiencies include acutely recognizing symptoms of distress, using appropriate language to offer support and enhancing the approach to capacity-building for mental health, as well as directing and accessing appropriate social resources. Dr. Persaud believed that the training program also helped medical practitioners to better understand patients and families on a personal level. “The knowledge that I would have gained in the course really changes your perspective, and it also enhances the ever-changing working environment because the virus would have evolved over a period of time,” he noted.

The frontline-worker participants learned how to assess the current situation by looking at who needs support, safety and security risks, the immediate basic and practical needs, and expected emotional reactions. “PAHO’s Psychological First Aid course equipped you with a number of strategies on how to think about situations in different ways, which in turn opened up a number of avenues to deal with a number of stressful situations,” he rationalized. “This includes dealing with pressurized situations with fellow colleagues at work, or even dealing with your own illness.” Fortuitously, helping to enhance the working environment through “look, listen, and link” came full circle for Dr. Persaud when he was diagnosed with COVID-19 while treating his patients. His team reassuringly rallied around him, and he was able to see the psychological support for community from a patient’s perspective.

- Forewords
- About Our Work
- COVID-19 Response
- Fostering Partnerships
- Adolescent and Youth Health
- Antimicrobial Resistance
- CaribVET
- Climate Change and Health
- Communication and Community Engagement
- Elimination Agenda
- Human Resources for Health Development
- Medicines and Health Technologies
- Noncommunicable Diseases
- Stronger Together Campaign
- Financial Summary
- Looking Ahead



#StrongerTogether 🖱️

The Campaign focuses on mental health and positive coping strategies during the COVID-19 pandemic and the 2020 hurricane season. Initially launched in 2019, Stronger Together's emphasis on mental health and psychosocial support was even more critical during the pandemic. Through its "Connecting to feel calm, safe and helpful" slogan, the Campaign champions the importance of a resilient, connected Caribbean region. It sensitizes the region on identifying and engaging persons in need of support and signposts appropriate information and resources.

The Campaign, aimed at promoting mental well-being and positive coping strategies during the COVID-19 pandemic, reached approximately 3,857,964 people across 19 Caribbean countries.

Stronger Together Campaign

A collaboration with the Caribbean Development Bank, Stronger Together embodies PAHO's multistakeholder, interprogrammatic approach to addressing Caribbean public health.

The Campaign included a Psychological First Aid illustrated guide, a social media package, a jingle, and audio and video public service announcements.


The Stronger Together communication campaign was implemented across 19 countries and territories via social media, through digital advertising, radio, and SMS in English, Dutch, and Haitian Creole.





- Forewords
- About Our Work
- COVID-19 Response
- Fostering Partnerships
- Adolescent and Youth Health
- Antimicrobial Resistance
- CaribVET
- Climate Change and Health
- Communication and Community Engagement
- Elimination Agenda
- Human Resources for Health Development
- Medicines and Health Technologies
- Noncommunicable Diseases
- Stronger Together Campaign
- Financial Summary
- Looking Ahead

Psychological First Aid (PFA) Booklet

PFA is a humane, supportive, and practical response to a fellow human being who is suffering and may need support. The second edition of this illustrated booklet is meant to guide the reader through the basic principles of PFA: look, listen, and link, while considering safety recommendations to prevent the spread of infectious diseases, such as COVID-19.

 This booklet was translated into Spanish, French, Creole, and Dutch, amplifying its regional reach. An audio version of the booklet was recorded in English and Haitian Creole to increase accessibility, particularly among persons with disabilities. This marked PAHO's first production of an audiobook. These innovative communication tools increased the dissemination of key messaging on PFA.


 Physical copies of the booklet were distributed in Haiti, Jamaica, and Suriname. In Jamaica, the publication was endorsed by the Ministry of Health and distributed as part of its collaborative work with the Red Cross to isolated communities due to COVID-19.



 In Haiti, the Creole version of the book was employed during Adolescent Week. Furthermore, the book was distributed among rural communities, particularly in border areas where persons are being repatriated from the Dominican Republic.

Stronger Together Campaign

A collaboration with the Caribbean Development Bank, Stronger Together embodies PAHO's multistakeholder, interprogrammatic approach to addressing Caribbean public health.

This publication has been adapted by Doctors Without Borders for use among immigrant communities in Europe.

 In Suriname, the booklet was utilized in national mental health campaigns. A radio jingle based on the publication has also aired on the Surinamese airways.

 A PFA self-learning course is available on the  Caribbean Node of the PAHO VCPH, and has been used by several Caribbean countries as a component of their capacity building efforts.



- Forewords
- About Our Work
- COVID-19 Response
- Fostering Partnerships
- Adolescent and Youth Health
- Antimicrobial Resistance
- CaribVET
- Climate Change and Health
- Communication and Community Engagement
- Elimination Agenda
- Human Resources for Health Development
- Medicines and Health Technologies
- Noncommunicable Diseases
- Stronger Together Campaign
- Financial Summary
- Looking Ahead



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Stronger Together Campaign

A collaboration with the Caribbean Development Bank, Stronger Together embodies PAHO's multistakeholder, interprogrammatic approach to addressing Caribbean public health.



Caribbean Wellness Week

The Stronger Together Campaign materials were integrated into programming for Caribbean Wellness Week, held in September 2020. Traditionally, regional countries highlight their best practices in health promotion and well-being during Wellness Week. Recognizing the ongoing challenges of the COVID-19 pandemic, the Campaign's messaging was quite pertinent during Wellness Week.

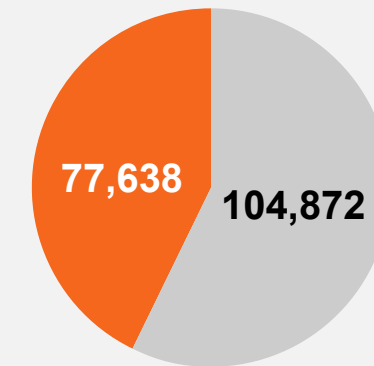


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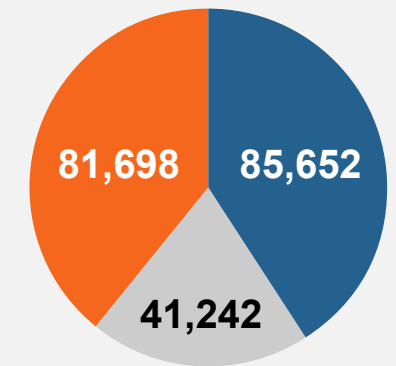
Financial Summary

Allocated Budget, Financing, and Implementation by Outcome – Base Programs

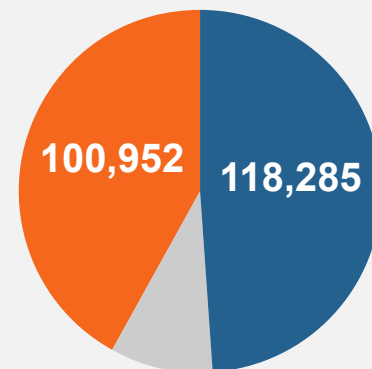
Expenditures: US\$ 2,651,531
To Be Implemented: US\$ 3,543,753
Financing Gap: US\$ 2,426,188
Approved Budget Space: US\$ 8,621,472



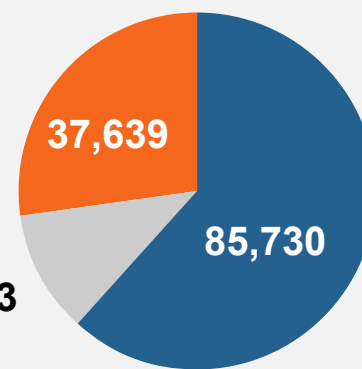
Access to comprehensive and quality health services



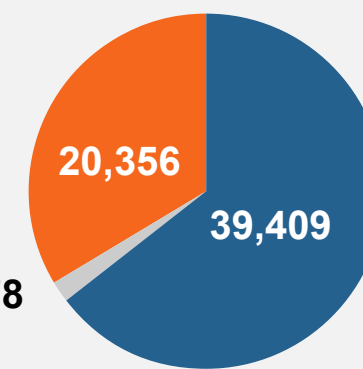
Health throughout the life course



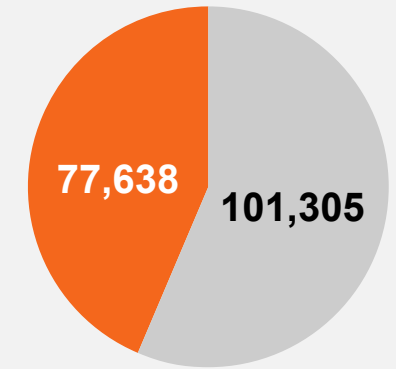
Response capacity for communicable diseases



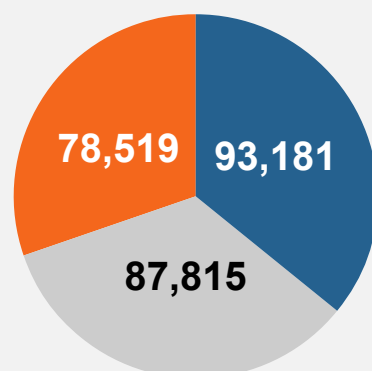
Access to services for NCDs and mental health conditions



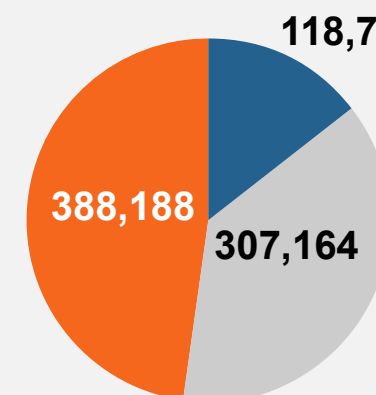
Response capacity for violence and injuries



Strengthened stewardship and governance



Health workforce



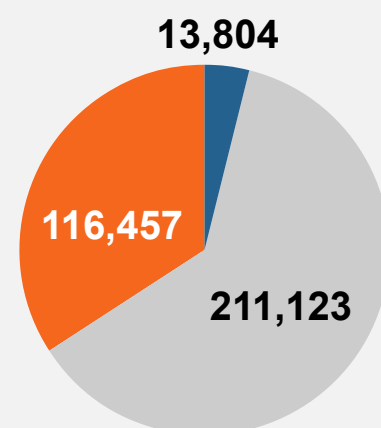
Access to health technologies



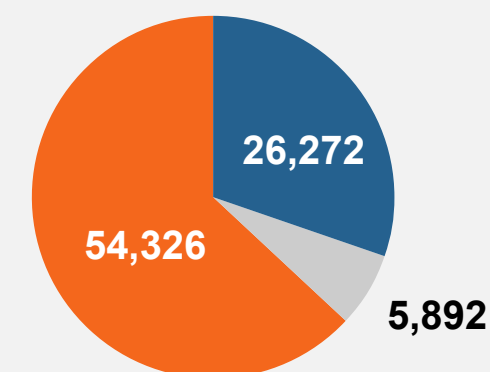
- Forewords
- About Our Work
- COVID-19 Response
- Fostering Partnerships
- Adolescent and Youth Health
- Antimicrobial Resistance
- CaribVET
- Climate Change and Health
- Communication and Community Engagement
- Elimination Agenda
- Human Resources for Health Development
- Medicines and Health Technologies
- Noncommunicable Diseases
- Stronger Together Campaign
- **Financial Summary**
- Looking Ahead

Allocated Budget, Financing, and Implementation by Outcome – Base Programs

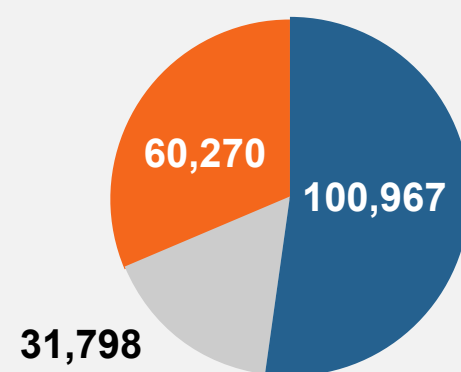
- Forewords
- About Our Work
- COVID-19 Response
- Fostering Partnerships
- Adolescent and Youth Health
- Antimicrobial Resistance
- CaribVET
- Climate Change and Health
- Communication and Community Engagement
- Elimination Agenda
- Human Resources for Health Development
- Medicines and Health Technologies
- Noncommunicable Diseases
- Stronger Together Campaign
- **Financial Summary**
- Looking Ahead



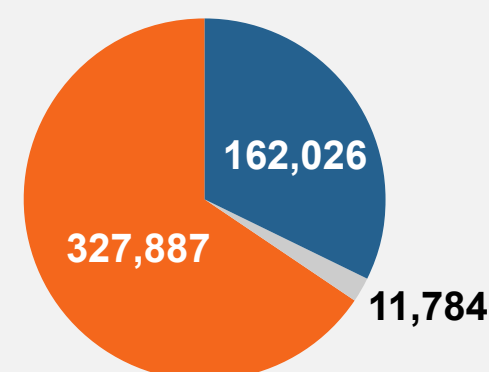
Strengthened financial protection



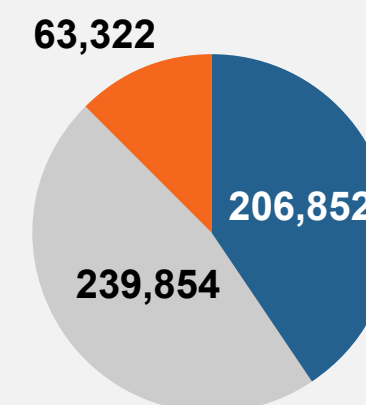
Health promotion and intersectoral action



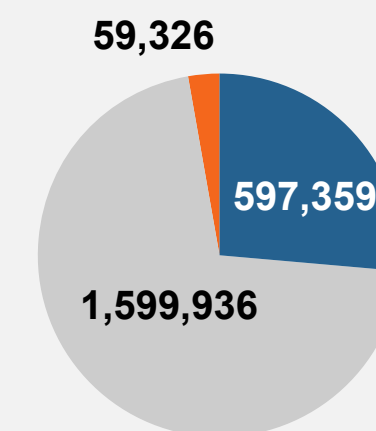
Elimination of communicable diseases



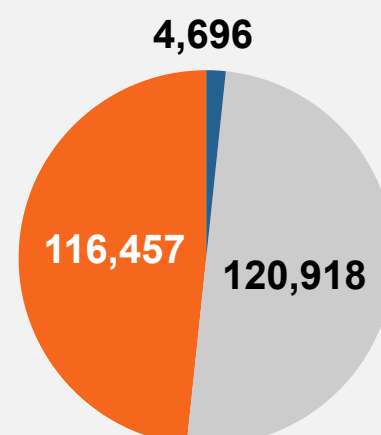
Integrated information systems for health



Risk factors for NCDs



Social and environmental determinants

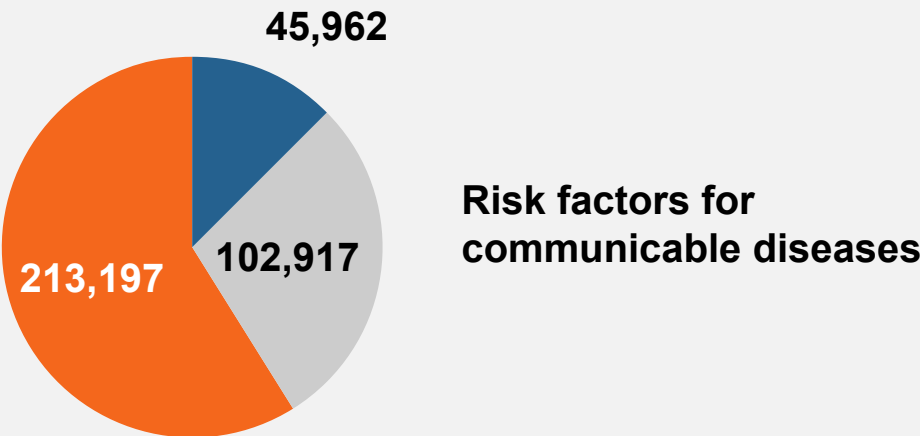
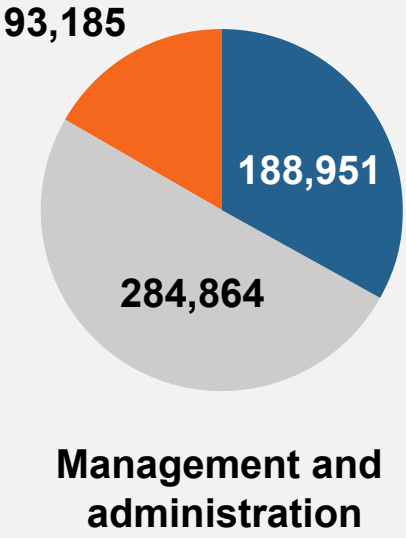
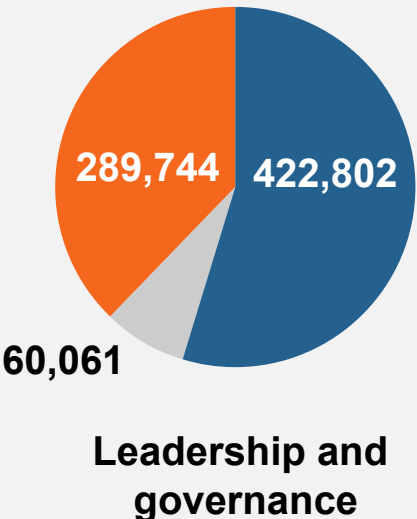
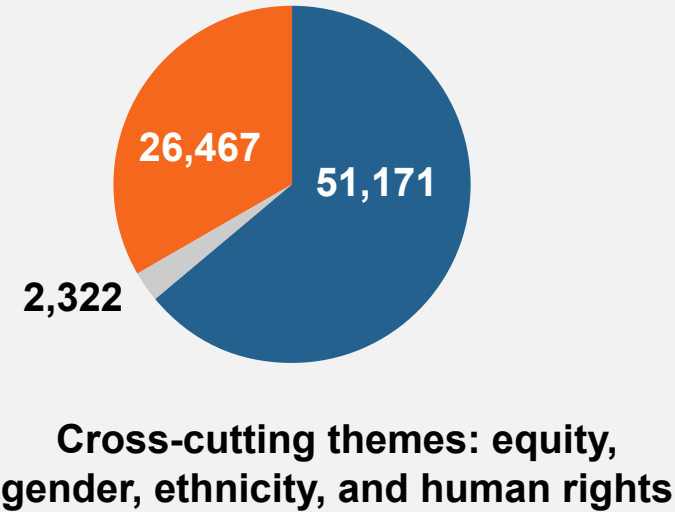
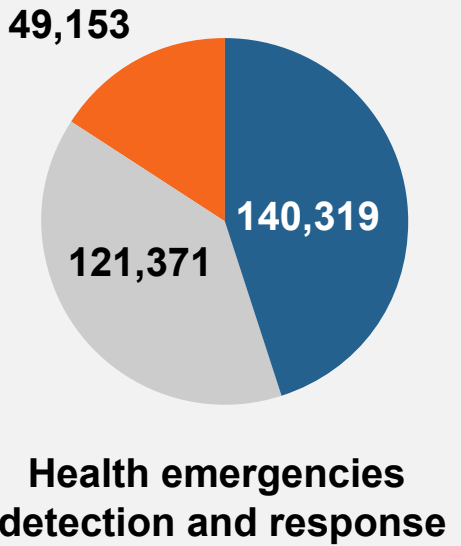
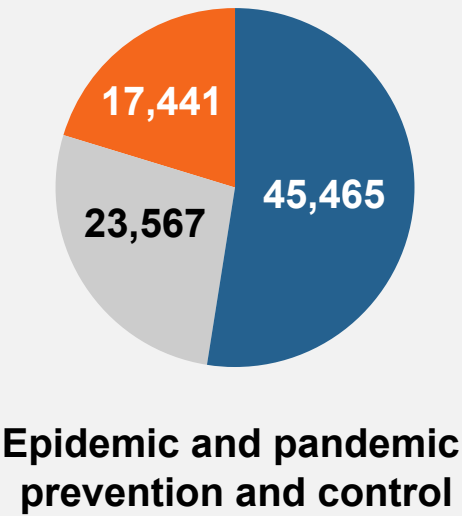
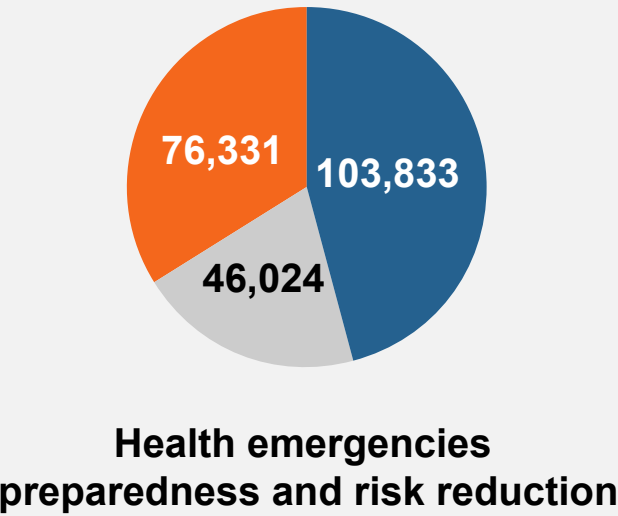


Increased public financing for health

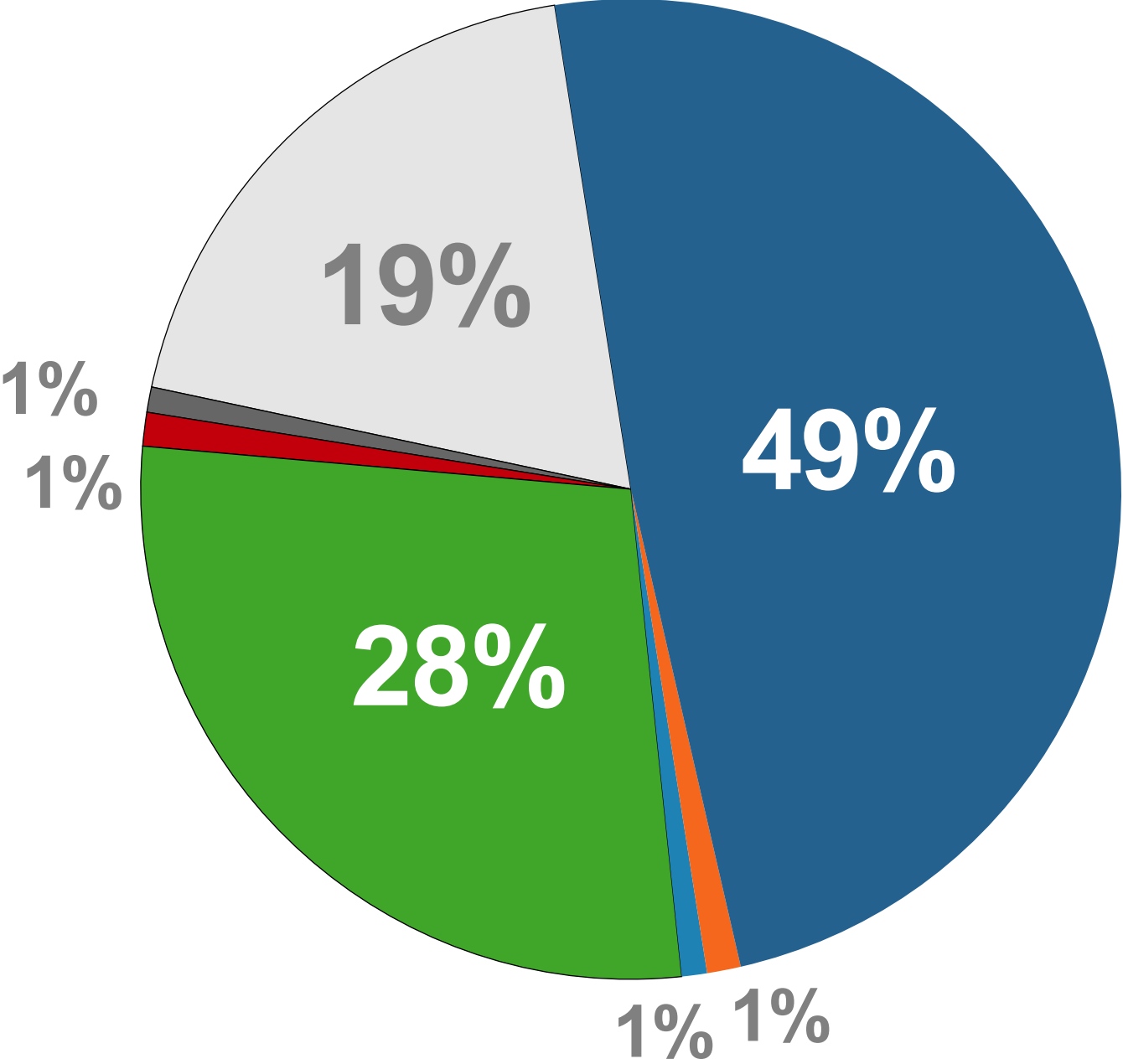


Allocated Budget, Financing, and Implementation by Outcome – Base Programs

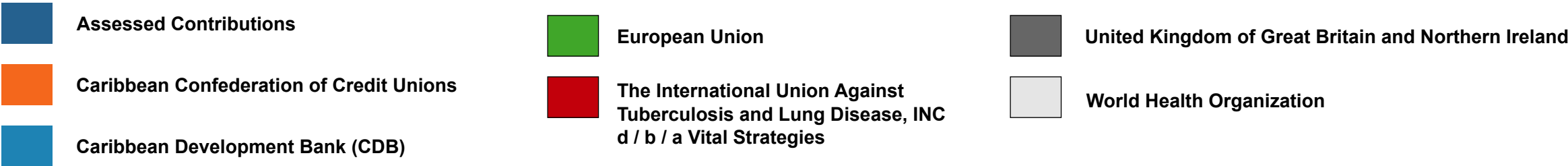
- Forewords
- About Our Work
- COVID-19 Response
- Fostering Partnerships
- Adolescent and Youth Health
- Antimicrobial Resistance
- CaribVET
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- Communication and Community Engagement
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- Medicines and Health Technologies
- Noncommunicable Diseases
- Stronger Together Campaign
- Financial Summary
- Looking Ahead



Financial Contributions By Partner



Source	Sum of Award Budget
Assessed Contributions	US\$ 3,599,265
Caribbean Confederation of Credit Unions	US\$ 75,000
Caribbean Development Bank (CDB)	US\$ 63,549
European Union	US\$ 2,034,011
The International Union against Tuberculosis and Lung Disease, INC d/b/a Vital Strategies	US\$ 74,336
United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland	US\$ 54,999
World Health Organization	US\$ 1,424,124
Grand Total	US\$ 7,325,284



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On the Caribbean Roadmap for Adolescent and Youth Health

"Within this pandemic we are seeing that sexual and reproductive health has been put in the background even more so than it was before. People are really focusing on food nutrition, which is fair, but if we do not focus on SRHR and gender-based violence, we are creating a pandemic within a pandemic. This Roadmap could not have come at a better time to provide the needed actions from young people."

*Michelle Belfor,
Sexual and Reproductive
Health and Rights (SRHR)
Advocate, Suriname*

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Looking Ahead

PAHO's focus on the COVID-19 response will not diminish in 2021. Efforts will concentrate around vaccine readiness and roll-out, and on liaising between COVAX and the countries to ensure that safe, effective, and quality COVID-19 vaccines are available and distributed equitably. The SPC will remain responsive to emerging health challenges and collaborate, in coordination with CARICOM and our subregional partners, in the safeguarding of the progress made toward universal health.

We look forward to new initiatives, including a partnership with the University of the West Indies to deliver the Certificate in Health Policy and Health Systems, a new project for the strengthening of regulatory capacities in the subregion for medicines and vaccines with the support of the Canadian Government, the work with the Human Resources for Health Task Force in collaboration with CARICOM, among other exciting initiatives.

Jessie Schutt-Aine
PAHO Subregional Program Coordinator,
Caribbean

Thank You to Our Partners in Health



UNITED NATIONS



During this turbulent time of great uncertainty, we have been comforted, encouraged, motivated, and humbled by the resilience, compassion, flexibility, and generosity of our partners. The remarkable people in these extraordinary organizations provided steadfast support and went above and beyond in partnership and service to the Caribbean. To our partners, we thank you for helping us to meet the challenges of this moment, so we can continue to serve the people of this great region with inclusion, integrity, compassion, accountability, respect, and excellence.



Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation

United States Pharmacopeia



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