



HEALTH INFORMATION SYSTEMS



Due to the multiplicity of stakeholders involved in the health care in Haiti, which was only magnified in the months following the earthquake, collection of reliable health information is a challenge. Historically there have been issues with incomplete data, inaccurate data, lack of timely data collection, and parallel information systems among various partners working in health. In addition, the information that is available is not always analyzed and used for decision-making in health planning and policy. With thousands of Haitians in precarious living situations and the threat of epidemic outbreaks, the need for a consolidated, reliable and usable data collection system becomes an essential public health tool. One of the main challenges is to set up and implement an effective and efficient structure that is capable of reorganizing and consolidating the various health information systems, in order to effectively support evidence-based decision making at all levels: institutional, local, district and central.

Since June of 2008, PAHO/WHO has been supporting the Ministry of Public Health and Population (MSPP, as per its acronym in French) to create a National Health Information System, which will be a consolidated health information system by which all relevant health information will be gathered for use in health planning, decision making, and action. This system will include information on morbidity, mortality, health systems, health services, human resources, and health financing at all levels of the Haitian health care system. In 2008 a 15-member committee, the National Health Information System Committee (CONASIS - *Comite National des Systèmes d'Information de la Sante*), under the leadership of the Planning and Evaluation Unit (UPE) of the MSPP, was created to develop this consolidated system. The CONASIS is supported by PAHO/WHO, other bilateral agencies (Cuban Medical Brigades, U.S. Center for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), USAID, Canadian Government, etc.) and other established health NGOs working in Haiti (MSH, Measure, etc.).

Unfortunately, the destruction of the MSPP building where the Planning and Evaluation Unit was located in the 2010 earthquake was a tremendous setback to the CONASIS and health information system project. However, even in the post-disaster period, the CONASIS was meeting on a monthly basis and certain subcommittees, i.e. surveillance, were meeting more frequently than that. PAHO/WHO continues to actively participate in the CONASIS and work with the MSPP to develop the necessary consolidated information system.

Activities carried out:

Immediately after the earthquake:

- The MSPP, with support from PAHO/WHO, CDC, the Cuban Medical Brigades, Canadian International Development Agency (CIDA), Japan International Cooperation Agency (JICA), Médecins Sans Frontiers (MSF) and others, created a situation room which became the base for collecting and managing health information, in order to help Haitian Health Authorities to make evidence-based decisions.
- A post-earthquake Sentinel Surveillance System was set up by the MSPP, PAHO/WHO, CDC and the Cuban Medical Brigade. By using and updating the surveillance forms used after the 2008 hurricanes, data collection was able to begin the next day with 52 sentinel surveillance sites (hospitals and health institutions). Data was then sent electronically to the Department of Epidemiology, to the National Public Health Laboratory and to PAHO/WHO.
- A standardized surveillance form was created for use by the National Sentinel Surveillance System and the Internally Displaced Population Surveillance System.
- Within the Health Cluster, a Disease Surveillance sub-cluster was established, which received and disseminated information from the Sentinel Surveillance System.
- PAHO/WHO helped to mobilize and bring epidemiologists from all over the world, and at one point there were a total of 40 epidemiologists working together at the central level.
- By February of 2010, the Internally Displaced Population Camps Surveillance System (IDPSS) was established and data is still being received from 40 Internally Displaced Population camps.
- Monthly epidemiological bulletins are published by the MSPP with PAHO/WHO support.
- The Sentinel Surveillance System established during the earthquake recovery became an essential tool in the fight against the cholera epidemic and is currently being strengthened with support from DFID (UK Department for International Development), CIDA, USAID, EU Delegation to Haiti, Finland, Italy and Andalucía.



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Activities carried out: (continued)

Activities with CONASIS:

- First meeting of CONASIS after the earthquake was held on April 30, 2010.
- Monthly meetings of CONASIS and PAHO/WHO participation in all of the 6 subcommittees: Organizing, Service Statistics, Hospital Information System, Epidemiologic Surveillance, Human Resources, and Financial Resources.

Other Health Information System Activities:

- PAHO/WHO financial support to hire 7 national departmental epidemiologists to strengthen the surveillance system.
- Technical cooperation and capacity building to improve collection, analysis and processing of information at all levels, through a core team of trainers (both epidemiologists and statisticians).

Challenges and next steps:

- Next phase is to consolidate all the databases of each subcommittee of CONASIS into one national ministry database. Progress made thus far by the CONASIS must be shared with the health authorities of the new incoming government to ensure continuity of the process.
- Main challenge is finding funding for the health information system development process.