



Rising sea levels, together with coastal erosion and salt water intrusion, increase in the intensity of tropical storms and hurricanes, as well as disruptions in rainfall and freshwater supply represent a significant threat to countries in the region. The Caribbean is considered as a priority for immediate intervention by the International Climate Fund (ICF).

Anticipated negative health impacts from climate change include worse sanitation conditions from limited water supplies during droughts or contamination during floods and conditions that favour the spread of water and vector-borne diseases like malaria, dengue and diarrheal diseases, as well as heat stress for vulnerable groups (such as the elderly).

In addition, when health facilities are destroyed or damaged by climate-related disasters their ability to provide emergency care to victims and ongoing healthcare for their communities is very limited, precisely when they are most needed.

In Latin America and the Caribbean more than 67% of hospitals are located in areas of high risk of disasters. Of the Caribbean hospitals surveyed to date (38 hospitals in total) 86% have a category B hospital safety score indicating potential risk for patients, hospital staff, and ability the function during and after a disaster. Both functional and non-structural issues (risk of roof damage and water and gas supplies, among others) tend to be the predominant causes of increased vulnerability. At the same time, healthcare facilities from the Caribbean are one of the largest consumers of energy—with a large environmental footprint—even when energy prices in the region are among the highest in the world and the resources used to pay for energy consumption could be used in improving health services.

The *Smart Hospital* Initiative incorporates climate change scenarios into the design of safer health facilities.

There are multiple gains in integrating disaster risk reduction with low carbon energy use, adaptation and environmental protection of the health sector. Investing in this kind of efforts has financial and social benefits, in addition to those related to health. In light of these issues, the Area on Emergency Preparedness and Disaster Relief from PAHO/WHO is working towards achieving health care facilities that are both environmentally greener and safer against disasters and the impact of climate change.

The Smart Hospital Initiative in the Caribbean builds on the Hospital Safety Index, the flagship of PAHO/WHO's disaster risk reduction program, which has become a global tool for assessing the likelihood that a hospital can remain functional during disaster situations. The best design criteria of safe hospitals are not always the most beneficial for climate adaptation and mitigation and it becomes necessary to develop a higher standard of design and construction of new hospitals incorporating a lower energy and water use to help withstand expected climate variability and change.

The Smart Hospital Initiative, made possible with the support of the United Kingdom's Department for International Development (DFID), aims to bridge this gap between environmental performance or climate proofing and hazard resilience and disaster risk reduction in health facilities.

The incorporation of climate change scenarios into the design of safer health facilities has become an imperative, and all of us need to consider both the potential risk of hazards as climate change and the benefits of promoting joint efforts of health and other sectors to reduce climate-related health risks, and to reduce the carbon footprint of the health sector in each country.