

WEBINAR SERIES ON PRIMARY HEALTH CARE WITH A TERRITORIAL PERSPECTIVE



WEBINAR #4. Strengthening the EPHF in the Caribbean

Executive Summary

KEYNOTE PRESENTATION

The fourth webinar in the series on [Primary Health Care \(PHC\) with a territorial perspective](#) took place on **September 4, 2024**, with the aim of sharing experiences and lessons learned from the implementation of the Essential Public Health Functions (EPHF) in the Caribbean and identifying strategic actions and investment priorities to enhance public health capacities and resilience. The introductory presentation provided a summary of the evaluation and strengthening methodology of the [renewed EPHF](#) published by the PAHO in 2020 and presented the “[Strategy for Strengthening the Essential Public Health Functions to Accelerate Health Systems Transformation 2024–2034](#)” approved by the Executive Committee in June 2024 and now submitted for review by the Directing Council in October 2024.

450 participants

54 countries



Natalia Houghton, Technical Officer, Primary Health Care Policy, Planning and Evaluation, PAHO/WHO

Highlighted the progress being made in the Caribbean, with **nine countries completing baseline EPHF implementations to assess capacities and identify priorities**, leading to the development of strategic action plans. She presented key findings of the evaluations, underscoring the varying stages of development in capacities among countries and emphasizing the need for a regional framework to address challenges and guide strategic actions through the identification of priority areas.

COUNTRY REPRESENTATIVES PANEL

Dwight Calixte, Chief Health Planner, Ministry of Health, Wellness and Elderly Affairs, Saint Lucia

Provided an overview of Saint Lucia’s experience implementing the EPHF evaluation and discussed key opportunities and challenges in strengthening the EPHF in the country. Specifically, Calixte emphasized flexibility in public health planning as key. Saint Lucia’s ability to adapt EPHF methodologies to local context shows that other more rigid frameworks may need to be adjusted to be effective in different contexts. Additionally, he noted that prioritizing interventions that have the most significant impact on public health outcomes ensures that resources are used efficiently and effectively. Saint Lucia’s emphasis on engaging a broad range of stakeholders, including those from outside the health sector, underscores the importance of intersectoral collaboration in public health initiatives. This approach ensured that public health strategies consider all determinants of health.





Jorge Polanco, Director of Hospital Services & Allied Health, Ministry of Health and Wellness, Belize



Teri-Ann Joseph, Deputy Chief Medical Officer, Ministry of Health, Wellness and Environment, Antigua and Barbuda

Belize is currently developing a national health sector strategic plan and for Polanco’s intervention he discussed how priorities identified through the EPHF evaluation are aligned with this ongoing development process. He emphasized the importance of robust monitoring and evaluation systems to be able to measure the performance and impact of interventions at all levels, as Belize is working in parallel to strengthen monitoring and evaluation in the country.

Another priority area identified was the sustainability of health financing. Belize has recently expanded its National Health Insurance, a structure whose financing falls under the Ministry of Finance, and Polanco emphasized the importance of ensuring efficiency by minimizing the duplication of efforts and utilizing funds wisely. Collaboration with Ministries of Finance is key to enhancing the effective incorporation of EPHFs into health system strengthening efforts. To conclude, Polanco highlighted the efforts by Belize to strengthen intersectoral collaboration and promote health in all policies, especially programs related to addressing NCDs and social determinants.

Began her intervention by expressing the importance of the EPHF evaluation to building a more resilient health system in Antigua and Barbuda. The assessment provided a thorough evaluation of the public health system, highlighting strengths, weaknesses, and areas for improvement. Joseph noted these findings as critical to informing the next steps in developing a more resilient and responsive health system that can effectively address current and future challenges. She detailed how Antigua and Barbuda are using the results from the EPHF evaluation to inform strategic goals for the updating of the National Health Strategic Plan. The evaluation identified several priority areas for strengthening such as health financing and human resources for health within primary health care and integrated health service delivery networks.

In discussing how Eastern Caribbean Countries (ECC) can leverage their unique regional characteristics in the implementation of the EPHF, Joseph noted that the ECC already has a foundation for regional collaboration through organizations like the OECS, CARICOM, and CARPHA. By strengthening these partnerships, they can share resources, expertise, and best practices, which is instrumental for the collective implementation of EPHF across the region.

REMARKS FROM PAHO COUNTRY OFFICE OFFICIALS



Amalia Del Riego, PAHO/WHO Representative for Barbados, and the Eastern Caribbean Countries

Identified the essential public health functions as a powerful tool to support PAHO’s technical cooperation with countries in the Caribbean, emphasizing their role in the transformation of health systems based on PHC. Del Riego noted that while small island developing states are committed to these transformation processes, the challenge lies in sustaining these processes within their unique contexts. For instance, many countries in the Eastern Caribbean face limited human resource capacities, and in this regard, the framework and tools of the EPHF evaluation can help facilitate necessary processes that might otherwise not be able to occur. The evaluation results are clearly linked to national health planning efforts, with inputs already being integrated into the development of PAHO’s Country Cooperation Strategies (CCS).



Eldonna Boisson, PAHO/WHO Representative for Bahamas, Turks and Caicos Islands

Summarized The Bahamas’ experience implementing the EPHF evaluation and how the results are now being used to inform ongoing health system strengthening efforts. This comprehensive evaluation has provided critical insights that are now being used to inform the country’s health system strengthening initiative, which encompasses seven workstreams addressing all areas of health system improvement. The EPHF evaluation has also supported the development of evidence-based national strategies and plans, including a multi-sectoral national plan for human resources for health, and has been crucial in guiding the development of the Country Cooperation Strategy (CCS) for The Bahamas. Overall, the EPHF evaluation process has served as a vital tool for strategic health planning and as well as for the way PAHO delivers technical cooperation to the country. Boisson concluded by acknowledging the success of the EPHF evaluation, largely attributed to broad stakeholder engagement and the strong leadership demonstrated by the Government of The Bahamas.



Roberto Bohrt, PAHO/WHO Health Systems and Services Advisor,
Belize

Highlighted how the EPHF evaluation results are being used to support PAHO's country cooperation strategy with the country. Belize's current CCS for 2023-2027 outlines seven strategic priorities and 23 focus areas that closely align with the EPHF, and the evaluation is being used at the core of the structuring process with the Ministry of Health to update the 10-year National Strategic Health Plan. Bohrt outlined three key outcomes within the framework of the strategic health plan: strengthening the governance and stewardship of the Ministry of Health, enhancing the governance of the health system, including relevant stakeholders, and improving the health status of individuals, families, and communities. The EPHF framework and results from the evaluation completed in 2023, are proving to be instrumental in guiding the strategic direction for the next decade.

In closing the webinar, **Ernesto Báscolo, Unit Chief, Primary Health Care and Integrated Service Delivery, PAHO/WHO**, emphasized that improving capacities for Essential Public Health Functions provides a practical pathway to building resilient health systems at both the national and subnational levels. A crucial next step is to maintain the momentum in evaluating and strengthening public health functions, increasing multi-level and inter-sectoral stakeholder engagement, as we continue to enhance capacities and translate the Primary Health Care approach from concept to reality. Báscolo also encouraged the continuation of engagement across different platforms and networks, such as the [Economic and Health Dialogue of the Americas](#). By prioritizing EPHF and advocating for PHC, we can build a healthier and more equitable future for all.

KEY MESSAGES

- Caribbean countries are making important progress in increasing their capacity to implement the EPHF
- Improving capacities for EPHF provides a practical pathway to building resilient PHC-based health systems at both the national and subnational levels, with evaluation results actively being used to inform health system strengthening processes
- Intersectoral collaboration is vital to ensuring the sustainability of these processes
- The EPHF are a valuable tool to support PAHO's technical cooperation with countries in the Caribbean and guide the development of Country Cooperation Strategies

To view the full recording and access the seminar materials, click [here](#).