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CCHSRD

Caribbean Centre for Health Systems
Research and Development
Better Health Systems...Healthier Lives

CCHSRD Newsletter

“Better Health Systems...Healthier Lives”

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CHIEF EDITOR
Professor Donald T. Simeon

EDITORIAL TEAM
Ms Jamelia Anthony
Ms Kershelle Barker
Ms Shelly-Ann Hunte
Ms Alissa Moore

DESIGN
Ms Kershelle Barker

**CARIBBEAN CENTRE FOR
HEALTH SYSTEMS RESEARCH
AND DEVELOPMENT**
The University of the West Indies
2nd Floor, Sir George Alleyne Building
25A Warner Street
St. Augustine
Trinidad and Tobago
West Indies

1 (868) 662 2002 ext 85486
HealthResearch.Centre@sta.uwi.edu
<https://sta.uwi.edu/cchsr/>

Editorial

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EDITORIAL

Our First Five Years of Work

The Caribbean Centre for Health Systems Research and Development (CCHSRD) was formally launched in September 2018. This marked the culmination of over a year of preparations and university approvals and signalled the start of its journey as the Caribbean’s newest health research centre. The critical role of Professor Terence Seemungal, then Dean, Faculty of Medical Sciences (FMS), University of the West Indies (UWI) throughout the process must be lauded as his tireless support enabled the Centre’s establishment.

The Centre’s mandate was defined after a review of existing health research centres in the Caribbean and consultations with key stakeholders. There was unanimous agreement that it should not duplicate work already being conducted but should instead address gaps in the Caribbean health research landscape. Consequently, it was decided that the Centre should focus on health policy and systems research as there was a need to facilitate the uptake of research evidence into health policymaking and system strengthening.

CCHSRD immediately and purposely embarked on its unique Mission ‘to generate and facilitate the use of research evidence, empowering Caribbean countries to strengthen health systems and policy making processes, thus enabling greater equity in health’. Although constrained by limited resources, the Centre was able to conduct an impressive body of impactful work in its first five years of operation while building fruitful partnerships

CCHSRD

OUR MISSION

To generate and facilitate the use of research evidence, empowering Caribbean countries to strengthen health systems and policy making processes, thus enabling greater equity in health



OUR VISION

To be a world-class centre, bringing together policymakers, researchers and communities, to achieve optimal population health outcomes



Our First Five Years of Work

the Ministries and other partner institutions. The very successful Evidence Informed Policymaking Fellowship Programme was also highly commended by the Fellows at the end of their 3-month training.

With a mandate to build research capacity at the FMS, the Centre has been providing technical support and training for academic staff members. Indeed, the Centre's impact on research productivity was assessed in association with the Medical Sciences Library, UWI. The analysis indicated that there was an increase in publications in peer-reviewed journals since the Centre was established in most Schools at the FMS. This success was due to initiatives such as its Research Discussion Forum, an innovative mechanism to strengthen the research culture and to promote collaboration among FMS researchers. It facilitates and encourages discussion to address the challenges they face in the conduct of their research. The Forum has over 80 members and also hosts research skills capacity building workshops and disseminates funding and training opportunities. Mentorship has been used in many institutions as an effective strategy to build research capacity and CCHSRD has implemented a programme at the FMS, with support from the Office of the Campus Registrar, UWI. Over 20 senior staff members volunteered to be mentors and were paired with mentees in April 2023. Initial feedback has been very positive, and the Mentorship Programme will be evaluated in April 2024.

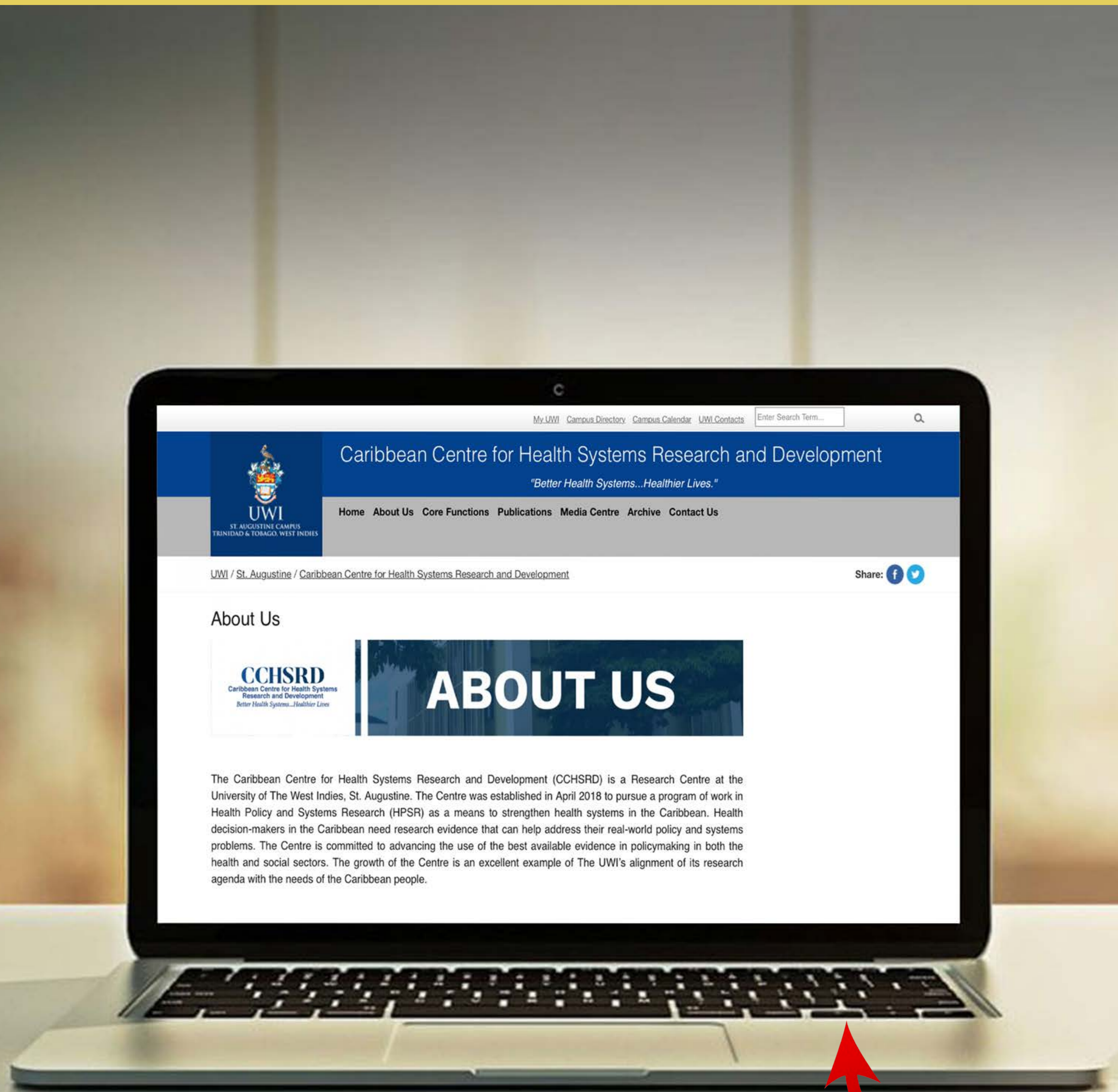
CCHSRD has contributed to the dissemination of local research findings to potential users i.e., policymakers, programme managers, health professionals, and the public. It led the very successful hosting of the FMS Research Day in 2019. Consequently, key stakeholders were invited to join in the hosting of a national event. The following year

Trinidad and Tobago's Inaugural National Health Research Conference was hosted in collaboration with the Ministry of Health, Tobago House of Assembly, the Regional Health Authorities, and the other universities based in T&T. It is now an annual event that all health researchers look forward to and the Fourth Annual Conference was hosted in 2023, which featured the presentation of over 110 papers. It should also be noted that the National Research Conferences play a critical role in building the capacity of young researchers as their findings are presented and feedback given in a collegial and nurturing environment.

The establishment of the Community of Practice was another of the Centre's accomplishments. It is a network of researchers, policymakers, health professionals and civil society actors, who are committed to improving health systems in the Caribbean. In operation since 2019, it now comprises 133 members from 14 CARICOM countries. One of its notable activities is the hosting of a monthly Discussion Series where experts in various fields deliver live, virtual presentations on topical issues, followed by keen discussions.

The COVID-19 pandemic was the most noteworthy public health event in the last five years and CCHSRD played its role in the production and sharing of relevant research findings to educate and support evidence-based practice by health care providers and the public. It hosted its first online Symposium in May 2020 and collaborated with partners, including the Ministry of Health, T&T in the hosting of several others. These symposia also provided timely research evidence to guide national responses and addressed issues such as the impact of the pandemic on health systems and public

Our First Five Years of Work



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health as well as the roll out of COVID-19 vaccines. The symposia were also used to highlight the COVID research that was conducted at the UWI. Most of this research was conducted by the FMS COVID Research Group, which was convened by CCHSRD in April 2020. The Group also included researchers from the Faculties of Social Sciences and Engineering and published over 30 manuscripts in peer-reviewed journals as well as presentations at scientific conferences.

It is important to highlight the critical and unwavering support that the FMS continues to provide i.e., in addition to funding the core CCHSRD staff. The Centre is also pleased for its fruitful engagement with donors. This has resulted in extra-budgetary income of over 400,000USD. The principal grants were from the International Development Research Centre (IDRC) / Hewlett Foundation (PEERSS Project) and the World Health Organization (BIRD Project). The Centre has also benefitted from MOUs with partners such as the Ministry of Health, T&T, the McMaster Health Forum, and the University of Western Ontario.

These institutions contributed significantly to the Centre's success to date through financial and in-kind support such as training opportunities and intern placements.

The very positive feedback from stakeholders on our accomplishments is greatly appreciated. A formal evaluation of our work is about to be conducted, but a review of the indicators in the Centre's monitoring and evaluation (M&E) framework revealed many positive outcomes across all Programme Objectives. We are aware that there is a lot more to be done, and therefore continue to actively seek additional funding to scale up our work. It is important for the Centre to continue its positive trajectory to make even more research evidence easily accessible to decisionmakers and thus contribute to better and more equitable health for the Caribbean peoples.

- Donald T. Simeon (Professor)

Director, Caribbean Centre for Health Systems Research and Development

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Reflecting, Learning and Charting the Course to New Horizons: The Culmination of Building Institutional Capacity for Health Policy and Systems Research and Delivery Science in Six WHO Regions



Reflecting, Learning and Charting the Course to New Horizons:

The Culmination of Building Institutional Capacity for Health Policy and Systems Research and Delivery Science in Six WHO Regions

- Ms Alissa Moore
Research Assistant, CCHSRD



Researchers and policymakers from the six mentee institutions and mentors from the K2P Center at the American University of Beirut, Lebanon - April 2023

The Caribbean Centre for Health Systems Research and Development (CCHSRD) attended the three-day culmination event in Beirut, Lebanon in April 2023 to mark the completion of the Building Institutional Capacity for Health Policy and Systems Research and Delivery Science (BIRD) project. The event was co-hosted by the [Knowledge to Policy \(K2P\) Center](#), American University of Beirut and the [Alliance for Health Policy and Systems Research](#), World Health Organization (WHO).

The goal of the BIRD project was to develop institutional capacity for evidence-informed decision-making in six mentee institutions, one from each WHO region. There was unanimous agreement that this was successfully achieved. The mentor (K2P Centre) was lauded by the mentees for providing timely and expert support throughout the three-year project. CCHSRD was the beneficiary (mentee) institution from the Region of the Americas.

Reflecting, Learning and Charting the Course to New Horizons: The Culmination of the BIRD Project in Six WHO Regions

At the culmination event, the six mentee institutions exchanged lessons learnt as well as stories of change that captured the impact of their work emanating from the project. This, and additional feedback from the delegates present were to be used by the Alliance as they reviewed their approach to facilitating evidence-informed policymaking at the country level.

Polymakers were also in attendance i.e., from the countries where the mentee institutions were based. They joined in reviewing the innovative models of collaboration and the institutional mechanisms that had been adopted and embedded within the mentee institutions. Issues related to adapting global evidence to a range of geographical, political and epidemiological contexts were discussed, as well as the requisite adjustments that were made to evidence-to-policy mechanisms during the pandemic. There were also sessions on the global health research landscape with a focus on gaps, challenges, funding trends and priorities.

CCHSRD was pleased to share how its involvement in the project had impacted its work in Trinidad & Tobago (T&T) and the wider Caribbean. For example, the Centre moved from being a mentee to a mentor when it hosted its Evidence to Policy (E2P) Fellowship Training Programme. The latter was established to promote a culture of evidence-informed policymaking in the Caribbean. It focused on building the capacity of policymakers and health researchers to find, appraise and use evidence in decision-making. This included the development of knowledge translation products and services to support the policymaking process, such as the hosting of stakeholder dialogues.



Above (Left): CCHSRD representatives (Ms Shelly-Ann Hunte, Ms Alissa Moore and Ms Kershelle Barker) with Professor Fadi El-Jardali, Director of the K2P Center; (Right): Participants discuss plans for the publication of the mentee institutions' case studies

Below (L-R): CCHSRD presented a summary of its outputs as part of the mentorship programme; Participants listen to a presentation at the Culmination Event; and CCHSRD's award for excellence in Evidence-Informed Health Policy



The Culmination of the BIRD Project in Six WHO Regions

To celebrate the successful completion of the international BIRD project, the CCHSRD held its own Culmination Event & Luncheon in July 2023. In attendance and delivering remarks were Professor Terence Seemungal (Dean, Faculty of Medical Sciences, The University of the West Indies, St. Augustine (UWI-STA)), Mr Lawrence Jaisingh (Director, Health Policy, Research and Planning, Ministry of Health T&T) and Professor Indar Ramnarine (Deputy Principal, The UWI-STA). They highlighted the value of evidence informed policymaking and its critical role in strengthening health systems. CCHSRD was challenged to continue its support and further strengthen its relationship with the Ministry of Health.

The Fellows presented summary videos of their Evidence Briefs for Policy (EBPs), which were developed for defined priority issues. They also shared their experiences in the CCHSRD's evidence-informed policymaking mentorship programme. The Fellows and their EBP topics were:

- ◆ Ms Jenise Tyson (Ministry of Health, T&T) – Providing Targeted Access to Sexual and Reproductive Health Services to Adolescents in Trinidad and Tobago.
- ◆ Dr Ertenisa Hamilton (Ministry of Health, Guyana) – Improving Access, Quality and Equity in Health Service Delivery in Guyana through the implementation of Integrated Health Service Delivery Networks.
- ◆ Dr Nelleen Baboolal (The UWI-STA) – Addressing the Mental Health and Physical Impact of Public Health Emergencies on Health Care Workers in Trinidad and Tobago.
- ◆ Dr Samantha Glasgow (The University of Trinidad and Tobago) – Strengthening Nursing Retention and Midwifery in the Public Healthcare System: A Human Resources for Health Imperative.



(L-R): CCHSRD's Evidence to Policy Fellows, Dr Samantha Glasgow, Ms Jenise Tyson, Dr Nelleen Baboolal and Dr Ertenisa Hamilton at the Culmination Event - July 2023

The Culmination of the BIRD Project in Six WHO Regions

The Briefs were shared with Government Ministries for their use of synthesised evidence to inform policy development. CCHSRD has also begun complementary activities such as Stakeholder Dialogues and Advocacy Campaigns to further facilitate research uptake into policy.

CCHSRD thanks the K2P Center for their expert mentorship and support in the Centre's establishment as a focal point for knowledge translation for health in the Caribbean. We also thank the Alliance for its funding support. CCHSRD benefitted immensely from the project and is committed to continue its collaboration with the Ministry of Health and other partners to advance the use of the best available evidence in health decision-making.



Dr Ertenisa Hamilton presenting her EBP at the CCHSRD's Evidence to Policy Fellowship Programme Culmination Event

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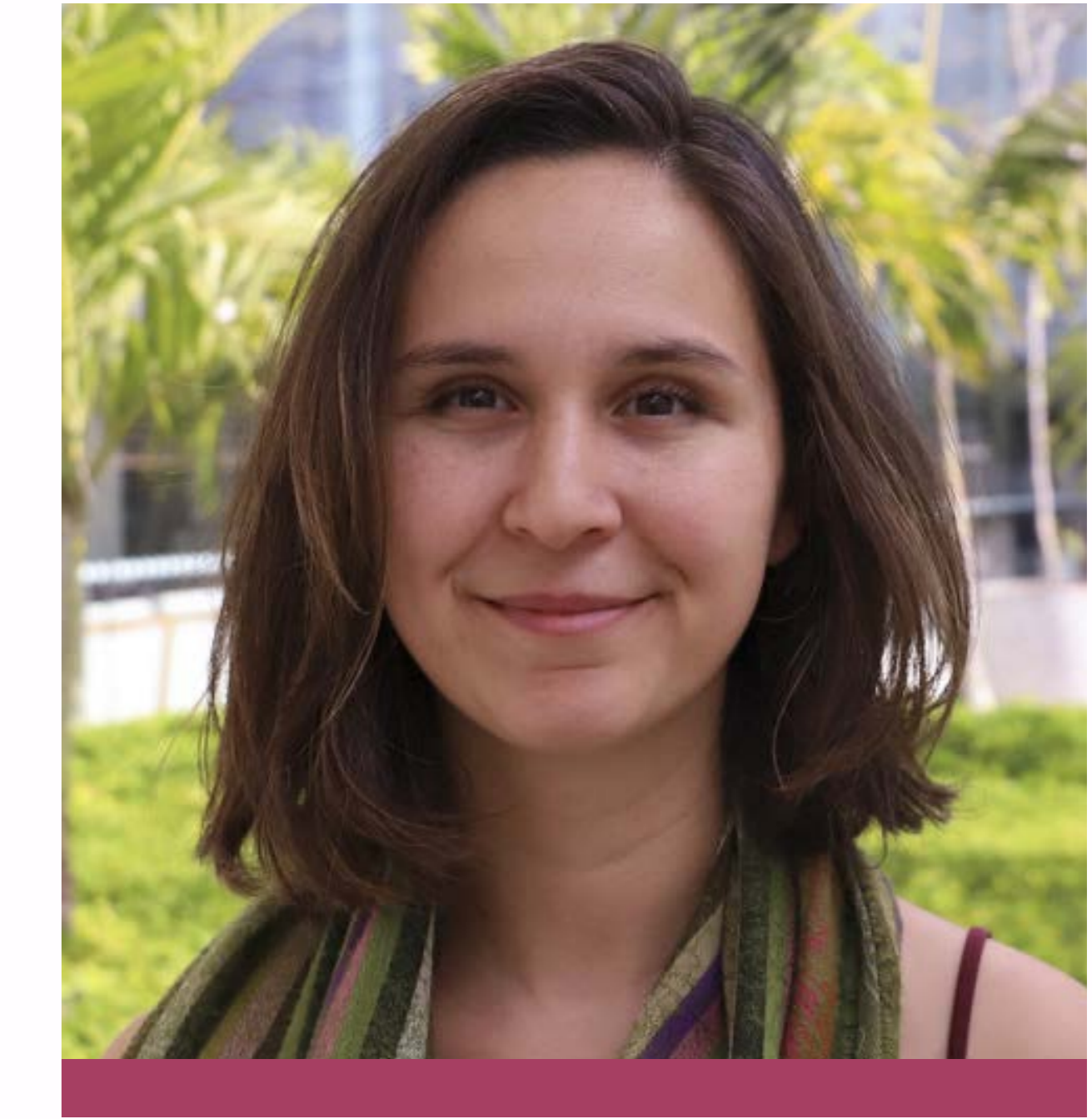
Hub LAC: Connecting Stakeholders for Evidence-Informed Policies in Latin America and the Caribbean



Hub LAC: Connecting Stakeholders for Evidence-Informed Policies in Latin America and the Caribbean

- *Ms Laura Boeira*

Executive Director of Instituto Veredas (Brazil) and co-director of Hub LAC



Establishing effective connections among researchers, decision-makers, and stakeholders is key to enhance evidence-informed policymaking (EIP) in the Latin America and the Caribbean (LAC) region. In recent years, the region has faced concurrent social and political challenges as well as witnessed remarkable advancements in EIP initiatives. [The Latin American and Caribbean Evidence Hub \(Hub LAC\)](#), established in 2022, has been uniting a diverse and vibrant community of knowledge producers, intermediaries, and policymakers dedicated to shaping policies in and for LAC.

Facilitating Collaborations and Knowledge Sharing

Hub LAC serves as a catalyst for technical collaborations, learning initiatives, and exchange workshops focused on evidence-informed policymaking. Since March 2022, the team has conducted multi-country workshops, developed multi-language evidence glossary and prepared country-level Evidence Ecosystems reports. The Hub has also organized and hosted the 'First Latin American and Caribbean Meeting of Evidence for Policies' (enLACe 2022), attracting participation of 370 individuals from 21 countries. The attendees comprised researchers, policymakers / governmental representatives, and civil society representatives. The event provided an opportunity to convene, connect, and engage in discussions surrounding research evidence in social policy.

Evidence Hub of Latin America and the Caribbean

Toward **decision-making informed by the best evidence** in **Latin America and the Caribbean**

GET TO KNOW THE HUB LAC

JOIN US

Connecting Stakeholders for Evidence-Informed Policies in LAC

The Hub has also created a social media presence, engaging with stakeholders through [LinkedIn](#), [Twitter](#) and published its own newsletter. The latter showcases LAC and Global South publications and spotlights key-stakeholders, and opportunities for knowledge sharing in the region.

Setting Priorities for Regional Action

During enLACe 2022, delegates proposed key topics and activities to represent shared priorities for the region. At the final plenary session, they agreed that sustainable development, mental health, Black populations and racism, and social, economic, and urban inequalities were pressing themes for LAC countries. To address these topics effectively, suggested activities included training for policymakers in government to work with evidence; training in innovative knowledge translation methodologies for evidence producers and disseminators; mapping and promoting connections among key actors in the evidence ecosystem, and monitoring the use of evidence in policymaking.

Caminhos para uma agenda comum: plenária para priorizar temas do Evidence Hub da América Latina e Caribe clia **18**

Jorge Barreto Brasil (FIOCRUZ - Brasília)

Meu contato com uso de evidências vem desde 2004, através da EVIDet QUE IMPLEMENTOU O PRIMEIRO NÚCLEO DE EVIDÊNCIAS MUNICIPAL.

Tudo isso graças ao **ESFORÇO PARA INSTITUCIONALIZAÇÃO** do uso de evidências no Brasil.

Isso gerou **OUTROS NÚCLEOS DE EVIDÊNCIAS** no Brasil.

Várias instituições hoje reconhecem a importância do uso de evidências, há um esforço crescente de fundamentação e financiamento desse processo.

Institucionalização de evidências científicas e **TRADUÇÃO DO CONHECIMENTO**.

As pessoas que se integram à essa rede **NÃO ABANDONAM, SÓ ADIRIAM MAIS PESSOAS**, e permanecem se aprimorando e inovando cada vez mais.

Shelly-Ann Hunte Trinidad y Tobago (Caribbean Center for Health Systems Research)

Em 2018, consegui fazer um exercício de facilitação, vendo o desenvolvimento de políticas na prática, em um dos nossos ministérios em Trinidad Tobago.

ESSE EXERCÍCIO FOI DUPLICADO em 2021, quando convidamos 4 ministérios do setor social para compartilharem o como eles usam evidências no desenvolvimento de políticas e suas necessidades.

Os resultados:

- Os líderes sabem a diferença de uma cultura de **PROCESSO DECISÓRIO SER BASEADA EM EVIDÊNCIAS**, e não havia nenhuma estrutura para apoiar o uso dessas evidências na prática.
- A **OPINIÃO PÚBLICA IMPORTA** e alimenta o processo do desenvolvimento de políticas.
- Os grupos de **IOS TAMBÉM TEM** UMA INFLUÊNCIA sobre o processo.
- O **MINISTÉRIO PRECISARIA DE TREINAMENTO** pra aprender a peneirar essas evidências. E lideranças e equipes técnicas, e a criação de uma cultura pra o uso de evidências.

Cristián Mansilla Chile (McMaster Health Forum)

Particpei desde 2018 em **VÁRIOS CONTEXTOS HISTÓRICOS**, para transformar contextos de saúde em evidências.

As instituições sofrem muita influência de coisas externas, temos que **FORMAR INSTITUIÇÕES QUE SE TRANSFORMAM** e trazem um crescimento em escala.

No Chile tivemos um **CRESCIMENTO MAIOR** com o uso das **DOES MUNICIPAIS**.

As políticas de saúde **NAS AMÉRICAS** foram muito fortes.

O ministério da Saúde começou a trazer muito **O USO DE EVIDÊNCIAS PARA A TOMADA DE DECISÕES**.

LEY RICARTE SOTO foi um momento de **CONSTRUÇÃO CIDADÃ**, que falava sobre ... **SAÚDE PÚBLICA, CUSTOS DE TRATAMENTOS** e como incorporar diferentes tipos de tratamento.

Dar muito mais institucionalidade no **USO DE EVIDÊNCIAS NA SAÚDE**.

O covid 19 é **RELEVANTE** para tomada de decisão.

Donald Simeon Trinidad y Tobago (University of the West Indies)

Em 2002 comecei minha história com o uso de evidência.

A **EVIDet** foi introduzida pela OPAS na região, para **CRITAR E APOIAR OS TOMADORES DE DECISÕES** no Caribe.

Não tínhamos os recursos para apoiar o processo de tomada de decisões baseadas em evidências no Caribe.

2008 o conselho recebeu um financiamento da OPAS.

Expandimos nossa colaboração e trabalho para outros ministérios e setores.

A necessidade do Caribe é criar uma cultura com políticas baseadas em evidências, para mudar o processo de criação de políticas.

Um dos maiores desafios é a falta de avaliação do que já temos estabelecido.

As parcerias e a colaboração internacional são essenciais para fortalecimento.

Plenária com o resultado das sessões temáticas de saúde, direitos humanos e meio ambiente, e educação emprego e serviço público: os temas e metodologias escolhidos foram...

Graphic summary of one of enLACe's panels (in Portuguese)

Connecting Stakeholders for Evidence-Informed Policies in LAC



Participants in an online debate on evidence networks: challenges and opportunities

What does the future hold?

Hub LAC is a unique platform that brings together stakeholders from diverse backgrounds to promote the development of evidence-informed policies in the LAC region. By fostering collaborations and facilitating knowledge sharing, Hub LAC strives to bridge the gap between research and policy, driving positive social change. As Hub LAC continues to evolve, it holds the potential to engage and spotlight stakeholders from different countries and sectors in the region, connecting expertise in diverse methodologies for future projects, led by Global South teams and aimed at our shared policy goals. We believe that, through collective efforts, policymakers and researchers in LAC can create a brighter future for the region and its communities.

The Hub LAC is co-directed by Instituto Veredas (a Brazilian NGO); the Evidence-Informed Health Policies Unit in the Chilean Ministry of Health; the Caribbean Centre for Health Systems Research and Development, University of the West Indies in Trinidad and Tobago; and Unit of Evidence and Deliberation for Decision Making at the Antioquia University in Colombia.

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- *Ms Kershelle Barker*
Junior Fellow, Evidence Synthesis, CCHSRD



Professor Simeon receiving his award from Professor Dan Ramdath at CARPHA's 67th Annual Health Research Conference

At the 67th Annual Health Research Conference of the Caribbean Public Health Agency (CARPHA) last April, Professor Donald Simeon was awarded for his “outstanding contribution to building research capacity and advancing evidence-informed health policy”. Since 1995, these research awards have been a signal honour to individuals who had made significant contributions to health in the Caribbean through their research exploits.

This year, Prof. Simeon was honoured for the volume, quality and impact of his research as well as his outstanding contributions in building the capacity of a generation of Caribbean health researchers. He also played a pivotal role in the evolution of the CARPHA Annual Health Research Conference, which was previously hosted by the Caribbean Health Research Council (CHRC), where he served as Director from 2002 to 2012.

CCHSRD Director Honoured at 2023 CARPHA Health Research Conference

His achievements over the last three decades are remarkable. Despite focusing on strengthening health research systems and capacity development in the Caribbean for more than 15 years while at CHRC and CARPHA, his research output was outstanding. Metrics don't usually tell the whole story but it is useful to note that he has more than 80 peer-reviewed publications with over 4250 citations, an [h-index](#) of 34 and an [i10-index](#) of 53. He has also raised over \$7.5 million (USD) in academic grants, and was recognized as being among [the top 2% most impactful researchers in his field worldwide](#). His expertise spans biostatistics, public health nutrition and research ethics.

Under Prof. Simeon's leadership, the CHRC transformed and secured extra-budgetary funding to support new and innovative programmes. These included the strengthening of national health research systems and the establishment of monitoring and evaluation (M&E) capacity and functions at the regional and national levels. The annual research conference also grew under his stewardship facilitating increased dissemination of health research evidence to policymakers throughout the Region.

In 2013, with the establishment of CARPHA, Prof. Simeon was appointed Deputy Executive Director and Director of the Research, Evaluation and Policy Development Unit. In the words of his colleague and good friend, Professor Gerard Hutchinson at the 2023 CARPHA Conference Awards Banquet, "Prof Simeon earned a reputation as a perfectionist [and] his no-nonsense visionary style" expanded the Unit's portfolio, which included the integration of behavioural sciences and the development of robust research ethics and public health policy portfolios. Despite financial challenges at the time, Prof. Simeon's knack for building partnerships with international agencies led to significant resource mobilisation which sustained the Unit.



Professor Simeon delivering his acceptance speech at the Conference

CCHSRD Director Honoured at 2023 CARPHA Health Research Conference

Prof. Simeon's health research leadership extended beyond his tenures at CHRC and CARPHA with the establishment of the Caribbean Centre for Health Systems Research and Development (CCHSRD) in 2018 at The University of the West Indies, St. Augustine. As its founding Director, he provides strategic direction, secures research grants, and facilitates capacity-building initiatives in research and evidence-informed decision-making. His commitment to the latter is unmistakable with the numerous policy briefs and evidence briefs that CCHSRD has produced, addressing critical health issues in the Caribbean.

In his acceptance speech, Prof. Simeon thanked Dr Joy St John, Executive Director of CARPHA for the award as well as for being honoured through the naming of the prize for the best student research at the annual conference after him since 2021 (Donald Simeon Prize for Best Student Research). He also acknowledged the critical role of his research mentors and collaborators over the years, and the support of his family throughout his demanding academic career.



Dr Damion Basdeo received the Donald Simeon Prize for Best Student Research from Professor Simeon himself at CARPHA's 67th Annual Health Research Conference

The 2023 CARPHA Health Research Conference Award is a well-deserved recognition of his outstanding contributions to health research and its uptake in the Caribbean, and we expect many more accomplishments from him in the future. From his own mouth has come the commitment to continue the work. As Prof. Hutchinson shared, through his tireless efforts Prof. Donald T. Simeon has embodied the ambition of the Caribbean Man – striving for a better life for everyone in the region.

CCHSRD joins CARPHA, fellow researchers, his colleagues, friends and supporters in congratulating Prof. Simeon on his award. Cheers!



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- *Ms Amy Ramzy*
Graduate Student, McMaster University

Amy Ramzy, a graduate student studying Global Health at McMaster University, Canada was an intern at the CCHSRD from May to August 2023. The internship was facilitated through the 2019 MOU between CCHSRD and the McMaster Health Forum with funding through the Queen Elizabeth II Diamond Jubilee Scholarship Program.

CCHSRD asked Amy to share her experiences and observations during her time at CCHSRD:

“ I immensely enjoyed my time at the CCHSRD and in Trinidad and Tobago (T&T) in general. On my arrival, I felt very welcomed, and throughout my internship everyone was very supportive.

I enjoyed working on several projects, including a proposal to support parents who experienced infant loss through a miscarriage or stillbirth. For this proposal, we collaborated with a community partner, the Mamatoto Resource and Birthing Centre. It was a pleasure collaborating with them and witnessing the power of partnership between academia and non-profit organizations.



CCHSRD Hosts Fifth McMaster University Intern

I learned so much from this experience, including systematic searching for evidence, creating a problem statement, crafting a convincing proposal, and budgeting. I hope that this project can help bereaved parents in the future by providing evidence to the T&T Ministry of Health that can improve the policies and practices currently in place.

Additionally, I felt inspired by the wonderful commitment to training and capacity building displayed at the CCHSRD. I noticed that they were dedicated to self-improvement and regularly accessed training opportunities from evidence-informed decision-making institutions. These included the webinars hosted by WHO's Evidence-Informed Policy Network (EVIPnet). I also learned that CCHSRD staff members had attended a Knowledge to Policy Fellowship Programme at the K2P Center, American University of Beirut, Lebanon. Significantly, when they returned to the Caribbean, they hosted their own Fellowship Programme and have been mentoring professionals in Government Ministries

to increase their capacity for evidence-informed policymaking. I was grateful for the opportunity to sit in on a training session for the Ministry of Sport and Community Development towards the development of an Evidence Brief for Policy to improve the sustainability of communities across T&T. I also helped to update training content for staff at Regional Health Authorities to improve their use of evidence in decision-making. Such capacity building is very important in global health for promoting sustainable development as well as for lifelong learning and personal growth.

Aside from work, I thoroughly enjoyed being immersed in the Trinidadian culture. I loved exploring the natural beauty and recreational resources of the island as I visited beaches, went hiking, and toured the Caroni Bird Sanctuary. I also loved getting to know Trinidad by trying new foods! I can confirm – the Fried Chicken in Trinidad tastes better than in Canada! 😊 I would love to return someday to explore what else this beautiful country has in store.

As I wrap up my Master's degree, I am looking forward to applying the valuable insights I learned about bridging gaps between research and health policy to my future career. I also want to extend a heartfelt "Thank You" to the CCHSRD, especially to its Director, Professor Donald Simeon, for the opportunity to work alongside the team. It has been a pleasure!



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Research Highlight: INTREPID: Investigating Psychotic Disorders in the Global South

The International REsearch Programme on Psychoses In Diverse Settings (INTREPID): Investigating Psychotic Disorders in the Global South

- Ms Casswina Donald

*Research Coordinator, INTREPID Project, Psychiatry Unit, Faculty of Medical Sciences
The University of the West Indies, St. Augustine*



Understanding Psychosis

Psychosis is a mental health condition that creates a disconnect from reality, leading to disturbances in thoughts, perceptions, mood, cognition, and behaviour. Individuals with this illness are challenged to distinguish between what is real and what they perceive. Unfortunately, the stigma surrounding psychotic disorders often results in delayed help seeking and treatment intervention thereby exacerbating the distressing symptoms for affected individuals and resulting in prolonged discomfort for both affected individuals and their families.

Symptoms and Challenges

People with psychosis often face stigma due to symptoms that may seem to interfere with their core identity. Hallucinations, where individuals see or hear things that others don't; and delusions, firmly held false beliefs that resist reason or evidence, are common. Additional challenges include disorganised thinking, leading to incoherent speech, and abnormal motor behaviour, such as unusual postures or movements. Psychotic disorders are broadly categorized into affective and non-affective states.

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Affective psychoses primarily involve mood disturbances, as seen in bipolar disorder and major depressive disorder with psychotic features. In contrast, non-affective psychoses, like schizophrenia and delusional disorder, feature disruptions in thought processes and perception.

INTREPID II: INTernational REsearch Programme on Psychosis In Diverse Settings



The INTREPID II Study

Psychotic disorders affect millions globally, with certain groups and regions having higher rates. Despite this, research on these disorders in the Global South (Latin America and the Caribbean, Asia, Africa, and Oceania) is limited. The INTREPID II study addressed this gap by investigating psychotic disorders in Kancheepuram (India), Ibadan (Nigeria), and northern Trinidad, offering insights into the incidence, presentation, outcomes, and impacts of untreated psychotic disorders in three diverse settings. This is important as numerous social or environmental risk factors are associated with an

individual experiencing a psychotic disorder at some point in their lives. These, for example, could be childhood trauma^{1,2}, cannabis use³, residence in urban areas⁴ or even ethnic density⁵. Environmental stressors can also be culture-specific regarding the lens through which certain events are viewed, carrying a certain degree of shame and social ramifications not apparent in other societies.

Key Findings

We identified over 1,000 cases of untreated psychotic disorders across the three sites. There were marked variations across and within sites in the sex, age, and clinical profiles of cases. For instance, across the sites, the percentage of men affected and the age at which symptoms began varied notably. In the catchment area of northern Trinidad, we recorded the highest rate of psychosis – almost three times higher than Ibadan and Kancheepuram - and the highest rate of affective psychosis⁶. Interestingly, the participants in northern Trinidad also experienced markedly more trauma and used much more cannabis than participants in the other two sites⁷. The relationship between cannabis use and psychotic disorders was explored, with Trinidad showing a notable association. It has been widely documented that both trauma and cannabis use are risk factors for developing a psychotic disorder and therefore in Trinidad these are areas that merit suitable prevention strategies.

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Urban-rural disparities in psychosis rates were also observed, challenging research primarily conducted in Northern Europe. Prior research undertaken primarily in Northern Europe indicated that rates of psychotic disorders were higher in urban areas compared with less urban or rural environments. Our study revealed higher overall rates of psychosis in the urban areas of Trinidad, an inverse association in Nigeria, and no difference in India. These findings suggest that the relationship between urban living and psychotic disorders varied across contexts outside of Northern Europe⁸.

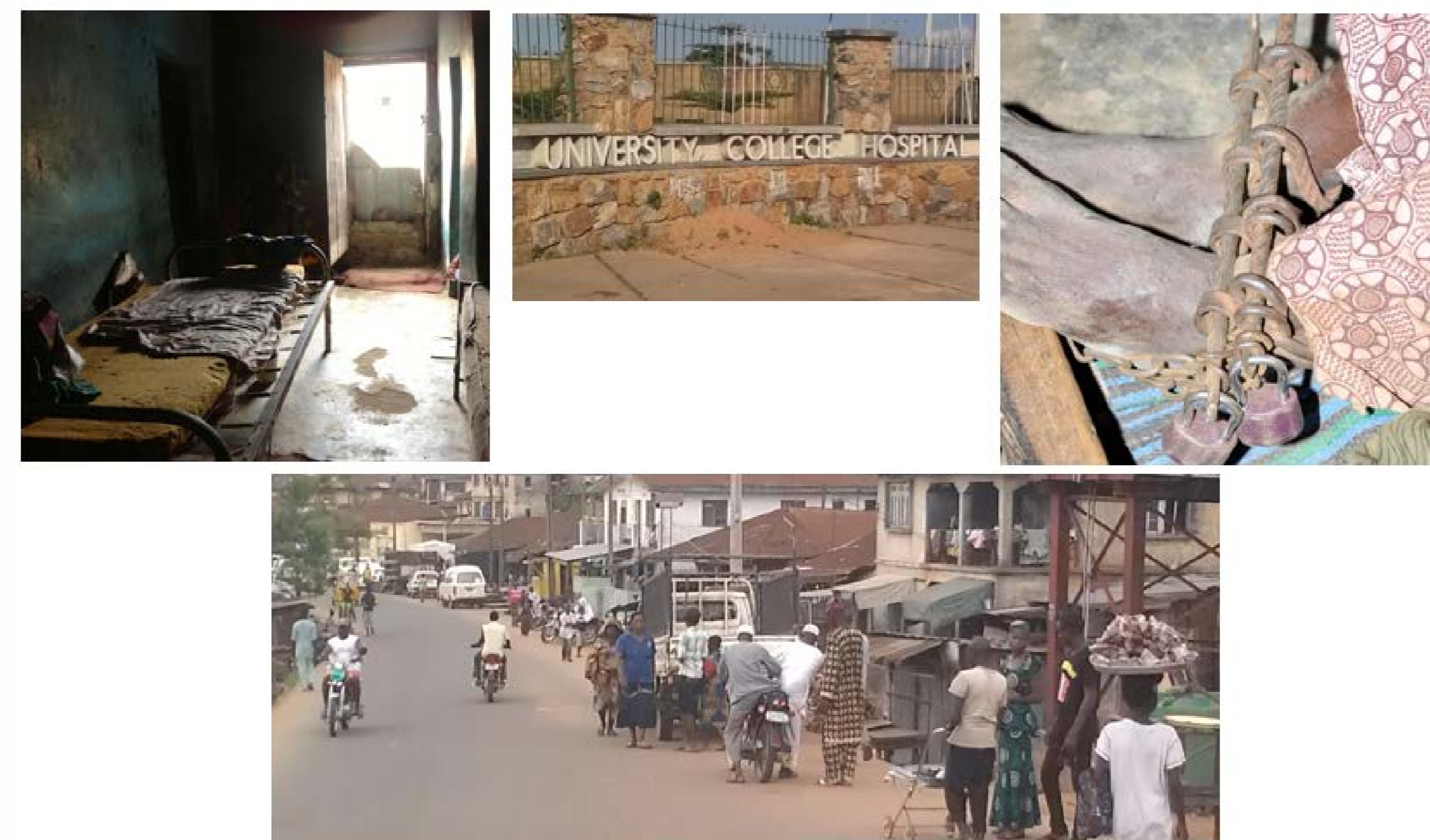
Catchment area in Northern Trinidad



Catchment area in Tamil Nadu, India



Catchment area in Oyo State, Nigeria



Implications for Mental Health Services

The INTREPID II study emphasizes the need for tailored mental health services that consider regional contexts. Understanding demographic profiles, urban-rural differences, and associations with substance use provides valuable insights for developing preventive strategies. Ultimately, this ground-breaking study contributes to unravelling the complexities of psychotic disorders in the Global South, paving the way for improved mental health interventions.

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CARIBBEAN CENTRE FOR HEALTH SYSTEMS RESEARCH AND DEVELOPMENT

The University of the West Indies
2nd Floor, Sir George Alleyne Building
25A Warner Street
St. Augustine
Trinidad and Tobago
West Indies

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