



PROPOSAL FOR THE ESTABLISHMENT OF

THE CARIBBEAN CENTRE FOR HEALTH SYSTEMS RESEARCH AND DEVELOPMENT

**Office of the Dean
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St. Augustine**

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Background

A rigorous consultative process was used to develop the proposal to establish the Caribbean Centre for Health Systems Research and Development. It began at a meeting of senior officials of the University of the West Indies (UWI), St Augustine and the Ministry of Health, Trinidad and Tobago (MoH) in late 2016. At the meeting, it was noted that although quality research was being conducted at the Faculty of Medical Sciences (FMS), there was inadequate support to the Ministry's evidence-based policy making and programming. As a result, the Dean, FMS engaged the assistance of Prof Michael Clarke, a former Director at Canada's International Development Research Centre (IDRC) who conducted a fact-finding mission to Trinidad and Tobago in February 2017. The ensuing report included recommendations for the establishment of a [Southern] Caribbean Centre for Health Systems Research and Development (**Appendix 1**).

In April 2017, the Professor of Biostatistics and Research, FMS conducted a survey of the Faculty's academic staff to determine the status of research and to identify their needs. One of the findings was that there was good support for the establishment of a Research Centre (**Appendix 2**).

Based on these reports, the Dean's Research Advisory Committee¹ supported the establishment of the Centre and endorsed the next steps. The latter included the appointment of a Working Group to oversee the process and the hosting of a stakeholder retreat. The Working Group comprised FMS staff as well as two officials from the MoH.

Led by the Working group, the FMS, in collaboration with the MoH and supported by the Pan American Health Organization (PAHO), hosted a retreat to obtain buy-in from key stakeholders as well as to obtain their inputs into the scope, functions, governance structure and sustainability of the Centre. To support the discussions at the retreat, a report was prepared that assessed the needs for a Health Systems Research and Development Centre in the Caribbean (**Appendix 3**). This report included a Desk Review of Current Health Research Centres and Initiatives in the Caribbean (**Appendix 4**), which examined the Centre's core functions and work in the areas of health policy and systems research. The report also included a Review of the Scope of International Centres for Health Policy and Systems Research (**Appendix 5**) to identify international best practices regarding the mandates and functions of such Centres.

The stakeholder retreat was successfully hosted. There were 71 participants comprising all the key stakeholders i.e. from the UWI St Augustine Campus: Faculties of Medical Sciences, Social Sciences, Science and Technology, Engineering, Humanities and Education, Food and Agriculture as well as the HEU and the Office of Research, Development and Knowledge Transfer; from the UWI Mona and Cave Hill Campuses (Caribbean Institute for Health Research); University of Guyana; University of Suriname; CARICOM Secretariat; University of Trinidad and Tobago; Ministry of Health T&T, including the Regional Health Authorities; Ministry of Planning; Ministry

¹ Members include Prof. Karl, Theodore, Director, HEU, UWI, St. Augustine; Prof. Rainford Wilks, Caribbean Institute for Health Research, UWI, Mona; Prof. Seeromanie Harding, King's College, UK; Ms Maureen Manchouck, Former President, NIHERST, Trinidad and Tobago; and Dr Michael Clarke, University of Western Ontario, Canada

of Health, Suriname; Tobago House of Assembly; Pan American Health Organization; Caribbean Public Health Agency; Inter-American Development Bank; UNDP; PSI-Caribbean, Caribbean College of Family Physicians; the Thoracic Society of Trinidad and Tobago; and members of the Dean's Research Advisory Committee, including Prof Michael Clarke (**Appendix 6**). The participants supported the establishment of the Centre and indicated their commitment to collaborate with it. The primary output from the retreat was an agreed-upon strategic framework for the Centre, which included its mission, core functions, governance, sustainability, *inter alia*.

The establishment of the Centre would be an excellent example of UWI's alignment of its research agenda with the needs of the Caribbean people. Indeed, health systems in the Caribbean are under pressure from resource constraints, rising expectations and increasing population demands. Many of these systems are also fragmented and inequities in access and coverage exist. Weak health systems are a critical obstacle to improving health. This is a serious challenge facing all governments in the Caribbean.

Critically, health decision-makers in the Caribbean need research that can help address their real-world policy and systems problems. Health systems in the Caribbean require strengthening, with the need for more evidence based policy making and implementation as well as evaluation (1-3). The Needs Assessment, conducted in November 2017 (**Appendix 3**), confirmed that there is a demand by policymakers in the Caribbean for this type of research support, and that there is also scope to increase research production in this area. Traditionally, however, the nexus between decision-makers' research needs and the offerings of the academic community has not been seamless. Strategies to ensure the uptake of research into policy, programming and practice need to be developed and strengthened.

Health policy and systems research (HPSR) is a field of study that seeks to understand and improve how societies organise themselves in achieving collective health goals, and how different actors interact in the policy development and implementation processes to contribute to policy outcomes (4). This field of research focuses on health policies—how they are developed, implemented and evaluated; and health systems—what can be done to improve the performance of these systems, with a focus on any or all of the six health systems building blocks: governance, financing, service delivery arrangements, health human resources, information and evidence, and medical products and technologies (5). In short, it is a field of study that enhances the health policy process and the efficiency and effectiveness of the health system.

The Caribbean Centre for Health Systems Research and Development will provide academic excellence in the HPSR field. It will improve the relevance of the UWI to Caribbean Governments and will also aspire to make a mark in the international arena.

Utility of Health Policy and Systems Research

The utility of health policy and systems research derives directly from its ability to inform policy and decision making. If HPSR is conducted in a manner that is remote from policy and decision-making then it is likely to be of limited value. Close involvement of policy and decision makers is required throughout the research process – from identifying research questions, to interpreting data and writing up – in order to ensure the relevance of the final product.

World Health Organization's Alliance
for Health Policy and Systems Research

The Centre's 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.

Vision

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

Values

- ✓ Excellence
- ✓ Responsiveness
- ✓ Integrity
- ✓ Credibility
- ✓ Transparency
- ✓ Innovative and solution driven
- ✓ Inclusiveness
- ✓ Equity
- ✓ Ethics

Core Functions and Services

Before the core functions and services of the Centre were defined, a review was conducted of all the UWI Centres and Faculties (**Appendix 4**) to ensure that there was no overlap.

Function 1: Research execution

The Centre will conduct health systems, health services and health policy research, responsive to the needs of the decision-makers and health systems leaders in the Caribbean. The research program will emphasise the use of various methodologies such as implementation and improvement science and will span all thematic areas related to the achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals and other relevant regional research agendas.

In accordance with the value-added approach, behavioural research and research on health economics and health financing will be omitted, as these areas are well covered by other entities on the St. Augustine Campus i.e. the Faculty of Social Sciences and the Centre for Health Economics (HEU). Notably, inter-disciplinary collaboration will be pursued, where input from such disciplines is required for the execution of research projects.

In light of the intended collaboration with external stakeholders, it is important that the Intellectual Property rights of the staff and students at the Centre, especially as it relates to publications, be protected. This will be managed using the guidelines indicated in The UWI's *Policy on Intellectual Property Management and Commercialism* (6).

The preparation of policy briefs will be a priority for the Centre. These will be a primary facility for sharing the findings from the Centre's research with policymakers, partners, and other knowledge-users.

Function 2: Knowledge Translation activities

The Centre will assist policymakers and health system leaders to utilise the best available research evidence in health policy and health system decision-making, by providing them with the following products and services:

- ✓ Rapid Response to knowledge/evidence needs - A structured service to receive and respond to urgent requests for research evidence from decision-makers;
- ✓ Evidence briefs for policy - Documents that synthesize and contextualize the best available research evidence about a problem, identify options to address it, and implementation considerations;
- ✓ Evidence syntheses – We will synthesize the best available evidence and present its relevance to local contexts . Evidence will be drawn from systematic reviews and from single research studies to provide insights on public health topics that are ambiguous;
- ✓ Deliberative stakeholder dialogues - A focused discussion among policymakers and stakeholders on priority public health issues, that is informed by a pre-circulated evidence brief or synthesis;
- ✓ Clinical guidelines – For the management of the most important public health diseases. These will meet international best-practices in patient care, but which take into consideration the economic situation, healthcare system, and culture of the Caribbean.
- ✓ Repository of Caribbean research – With a focus on policy and systems strengthening relevant findings.

Function 3: Citizen Engagement

The ultimate goal of health system strengthening is to improve the health of citizens. Although public policy is important to create incentives and supportive environments for appropriate health behaviours, the actions of individuals and communities are pivotal to improve health and build resilient health systems. Growing evidence confirms that under the right conditions, citizen engagement can help governments achieve improved results (7-9).

The Centre will assist decision-makers and health system leaders to engage with communities as partners in health, by convening forums and dialogues with citizens to deliberate on current

health system problems and to identify evidence-based solutions to address contemporary health issues.

Citizen engagement will also be used to get their inputs in defining the research agenda and crafting research questions to be addressed by the Centre. This will also be an important facility for sharing the findings of the research conducted by the Centre with the community.

Function 4: Health Human Resource Training and Development

To build the competencies of health system managers, policy makers and other health professionals. Training courses in the following areas will be provided:

- ✓ Data use / knowledge management towards strengthening health systems;
- ✓ Evidence-informed policy development, implementation and evaluation.

Graduate student teaching and supervision towards the granting of Research Degrees in Health Sciences would be conducted.

The Centre will also develop and manage a program to strengthen the research capacity of academic staff. This would comprise customized training workshops with follow-up support. The training agenda would be defined by the FMS staff.

Strategies

The proposed Centre for Health Systems Research and Development originated from the aspiration to respond to the needs of CARICOM Ministries of Health. The following strategic approaches will therefore be used to shape the Centre's work program and to execute its core functions:

- ✓ Priority setting. The research agenda will be defined in collaboration with the Centre's principal stakeholders—the Ministries of Health as well as health professional and citizen representatives — after conducting priority setting exercises with them. The Centre's annual program of work will be strongly focused on the identified priorities.
- ✓ Embedded research. The research program will be embedded in the decision-making process. Policymakers and health system managers will therefore be actively involved in defining research questions and research will be conducted in partnership with them. This will ensure context-specific issues are accounted for and that research findings have greater relevance and uptake in decision-making.
- ✓ Inter-disciplinary and multisectoral collaboration. The multi-disciplinary nature of HPSR is well recognised. The Centre will pursue collaborative relationships with other Faculties and Centres, such as the Faculty of Social Sciences and the Centre for Health Economics (HEU), when input from these disciplines is required. Government Ministries, other than Health, as well as civil society organizations will also be engaged. The Centre is expected

to play in critical role in supporting Caribbean countries to achieve the health related Sustainable Development Goals. The latter require a multi-sectoral approach to programming in order to achieve success.

- ✓ Intra- and Inter-campus collaboration. The methodological strengths of existing UWI research centres on other campuses, are also recognised and well appreciated. In executing its research program, the Centre for Health Systems Research and Development will facilitate the UWI functioning as a single regional institution, through the pursuit of inter-campus collaboration. Care will be taken to ensure the Centre does not duplicate, but rather complements existing initiatives within the UWI system. The same holds for collaborations across and outside the UWI system in the Caribbean such as universities in Guyana and Suriname.
- ✓ Research independence. The value of the Centre will lie in its unique ability to respond to the research needs of Governments and to serve as an academic think-tank or research contractor. Notwithstanding this relationship, the Centre will conduct independent research and provide impartial advice that is founded upon research of the highest standards of academic inquiry.

Governance and Management Structure

The governance structure for the Centre is guided by the UWI's *"A policy for the establishment, operation and governance of units, centres and institutes at the University of the West Indies"* (10). Being a Campus Centre, the Caribbean Centre for Health Systems Research and Development will be hosted by the Faculty of Medical Sciences, at the University of the West Indies in St. Augustine. The Centre will be managed by a Director who will lead its strategic direction and oversee the operations of the Centre. An Advisory Board will be established to assist with goal setting and monitoring the achievement of its strategic objectives. The Advisory Board will be chaired by the Dean of the Faculty of Medical Sciences. Membership of the Advisory Board will include, but will not be limited to representatives from:

- ✓ Campus Board for Graduate Studies and Research
- ✓ Caribbean Institute for Health Research (CAIHR)
- ✓ Office of Research Development and Knowledge Transfer
- ✓ Ministry of Health, Trinidad and Tobago
- ✓ Other CARICOM Ministries of Health such as Guyana and Suriname
- ✓ Other Caribbean Universities such as University of Guyana and University of Suriname
- ✓ Regional health organisations such as Pan American Health Organisation
- ✓ Civil Society Organizations such as Healthy Caribbean Coalition
- ✓ International HPSR Centres such as the WHO's Alliance for Health Policy and Systems Research
- ✓ Community (Grassroots) representative

Staffing

The Centre will initially have the following staffing arrangements.

- ✓ Core staff. Dedicated academic and support staff as follows:
 - Director
 - Research Fellows
 - Clerical Assistant
- ✓ Non-core honorary, temporary and part-time staff. Positions funded through research grants.
- ✓ Adjunct staff. Academic staff from across the St. Augustine, Mona and Cave Hill UWI campuses as well as from University of Guyana, University of Suriname and other institutions, who are affiliated with the Centre will complement the Centre's expertise and capacity.

Financing

The budget is presented in **Appendix 7**.

The proposed financing arrangement for the Centre will be as follows:

- ✓ Contributions from the UWI to the Centre. Financial and in-kind support to cover infrastructure, salary of core staff (Director, Research Fellow and 1 Clerical Assistant).
- ✓ Contributions from Governments e.g. contracts with Ministries to support an approved work plan.
- ✓ Research Grants to provide funds to cover HPSR activities and staffing, consistent with the Centre's mandate.
- ✓ Fee-for-services. Professional fees for consultancy and other services, payable by benefiting countries and agencies.
- ✓ Other innovative funding mechanisms.

Monitoring and Evaluation

As indicated in the 2008 UWI's *Policy for the Establishment, Operation and Governance of Units, Centres and Institutes*, the Caribbean Centre for Health Systems Research and Development (being a Campus Centre) will be reviewed by the Principal every three years (9). This will include an assessment of the research and other outcomes of the Centre vis-vis its core functions.

A Monitoring and Evaluation framework will be developed. This would facilitate reporting on the achievement of the Centre's targets and would comprise clearly defined indicators of success. The framework will be guided by the Centre's Strategic Plan (to be developed).

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List of Appendices

1. Michael Clarke Report. May 2017.
2. Survey of Research and Research Needs of Academic Staff at the Faculty of Medical Sciences. October 2017.
3. Needs Assessment for Health Policy and Systems Research Centre in the Caribbean. November 2017.
4. Desk Review of Current Health Research Centres and Initiatives in the Caribbean. November 2017.
5. Review of the Scope of International Centres for Health Policy and Systems Research. November 2017.
6. Retreat Report: Caribbean Centre for Health Systems Research and Development. November 2017.
7. Budget for Caribbean Centre Health Systems Research and Development