

Strengthening human resources for health to respond to COVID-19 and other emerging pandemics: policy brief, May 2022

Introduction

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To support CARICOM's regional response to the evolving COVID-19 pandemic by strengthening HRH within Member States, it is essential to address HRH challenges such as staff shortages, uneven distribution of existing staff and gaps in skills and competencies, by means of enhancing supply, capacity, training, and development. This would also set the stage for robust response to other emerging pandemics.

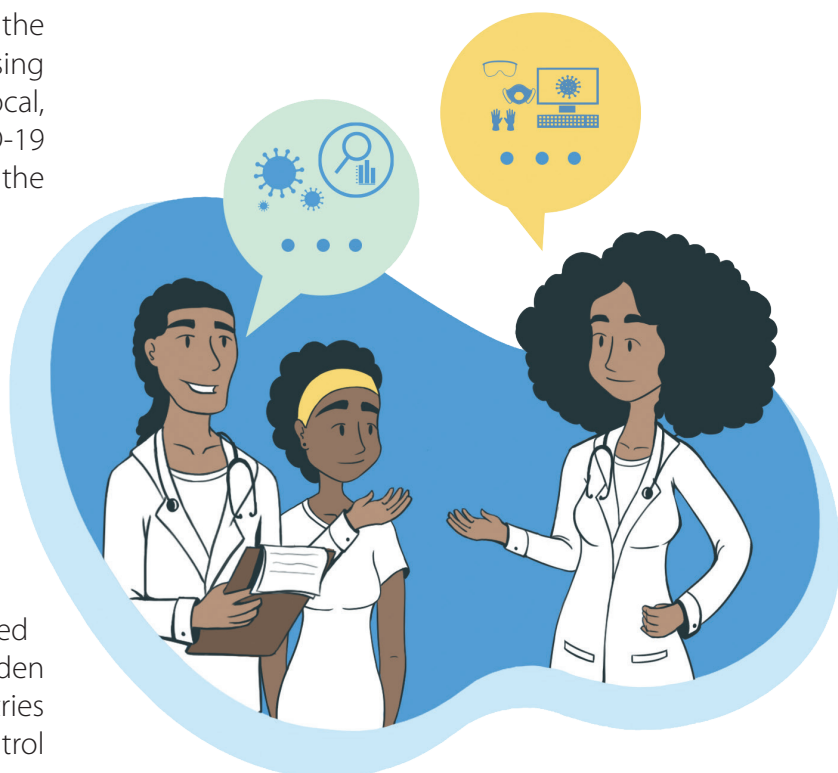
The 39th meeting of the Council for Human and Social Development (COHSOD) in November 2020 mandated the Caribbean Community (CARICOM) Secretariat in collaboration with PAHO to establish a Human Resources for Health Action Task Force (HRH-ATF) to advise and monitor the development of public policy in the countries and territories of the Caribbean, recognising the critical role of a resilient health workforce to local, national, and regional response to the COVID-19 pandemic and the global challenges related to the health workforce labour market.^{1,2}

The launch of the HRH-ATF on April 20, 2021 brought forward concerted regional action to strengthening HRH relevant to the current international health context. It also set a trajectory towards securing that these efforts support local, national, and regional response to other emerging pandemics and health emergencies.

COVID-19 has directly and indirectly affected healthcare workers (HCW) across CARICOM. The burden of this disease among HCW has impacted on countries sustaining health services delivery specific to control

and prevention of COVID-19, as well as those necessary for the health of the wider population. Studies carried out by PAHO and WHO^{3,4} have identified that within the Caribbean:

- Surge needs associated with the COVID-19 pandemic added further stress to existing HCW challenges.
- Delivery of primary care services was affected as HCW were redistributed and facilities repurposed.
- Improving HCW availability, as well as protecting and supporting HCW were needs highlighted by the COVID-19 pandemic.



1 Pan American Health Organization. Human Resources for Health Action Task Force launched in the Caribbean - PAHO/WHO | Pan American Health Organization [Internet]. [cited 2021 Nov 15]. Available from: <https://www.paho.org/en/news/25-5-2021-human-resources-health-action-task-force-launched-caribbean>

2 Liu JX, Goryakin Y, Maeda A, Bruckner T, Scheffler R. Global Health Workforce Labor Market Projections for 2030. Hum Resour Health [Internet]. 2017 Feb 3 [cited 2021 Nov 8];15(1):1–12. Available from: <https://human-resources-health.biomedcentral.com/articles/10.1186/s12960-017-0187-2>

3 Pan American Health Organization. Human Resources for Health and the COVID-19 Response in the Caribbean [Internet]. 2020. Available from: <https://www.paho.org/en/documents/human-resources-health-and-covid-19-response-caribbean>