

# BELIZEAN INNOVATION: THE BELIZE NATIONAL HEALTH INFORMATION SYSTEM



Perched on the Caribbean coast and as diverse ethnically and culturally as it is geographically, Belize is developing a cutting-edge web-based health information system.

The Belize Health Information System (BHIS), which was inaugurated on 16 September 2008, is a fully integrated, comprehensive health information system intended to improve individual health outcomes and public health performance, and optimize resource utilization.

According to Dr. Peter Allen, Chief Executive Officer of the Ministry of Health: "The measure of success is the positive outcomes for those who encounter our system. There will always be challenges since no system or tool is ever perfect - the focus must always remain on the benefits to patients and our people."

The BHIS allows population-based, health services, and records-based data to be made available to authorized users anywhere in the country almost as soon as they are entered in the system. It comprises a set of mostly interdependent modules surrounding the central Electronic Health Record and Admissions-Discharge-Transfer functions.

The system was financed initially through a health sector reform loan from the Inter-American Development Bank and the Caribbean Development Bank. The Pan American Health Organization/World Health Organization (PAHO/WHO) and Accesstec of New Brunswick, Canada provided technical cooperation.

## **Hon. Pablo Marin Minister of Health**

"The Government of Belize is proud to share our experience in realizing a truly national health information system. It is a remarkable achievement but most importantly it is a tool that enables us to improve the quality and effectiveness of health care for all Belizeans. We invite you to learn from our experiences. It is our sincere hope that BHIS, which showcases Belizean innovation, will help contribute to the fight we are all waging in delivering improved and effective health care."

## **Dr. Beverley Barnett PAHO/WHO Belize Representative**

"Health information is at the heart of the public health system. In promoting and protecting the health of the population, it is critical to know and analyze the health situation, especially of vulnerable groups. Without a reliable health information system that is user-friendly and which provides quality information that can be used in various ways, it is difficult to judge if the health system is doing the right things, and doing them right. The Belize Health Information System, a "bottom-up", home-grown system, will go a long way in ensuring that health of the people of Belize continues to improve. The Pan American Health Organization is pleased to support this effort, and to facilitate sharing the Belize experience and the lessons learned with other countries. We will continue to work with the Ministry of Health, the Health Metrics Network, and other partners to address this very important area."



In 2006, a grant was received from the Health Metrics Network (HMN) that first brought the Belize system to the attention of the wider Network. In May 2008, Belize became the first country in the Americas to be granted priority technical support from HMN, as a “Wave One” country.

The country has completed an assessment of its health information system (HIS) and is currently in the process of finalizing its HIS Strategic Plan, with continued HMN and PAHO/WHO technical cooperation. As part of

the process, a 2-day stakeholder consultation was held in July 2009 to finalize Belize’s HIS strategic plan for the next five years.

The consultation identified the following key areas for inclusion in the strategic plan:

- Development of a modernized legal framework in support of HIS. This will facilitate better links between health services and health outcomes.
- Strengthening data management across the sector. The efficacy of health interventions depend in part on the overall quality of the HIS data, which form the basis for evidence-based decisions.
- Better dissemination and use of information. Good data lead to better information, which in turn leads to better decisions and health outcomes.

The workshop “Belize Health Information System: Lessons Learned to Strengthen National Health Information Systems in Barbados, Eastern Caribbean Countries, Jamaica, and Trinidad and Tobago” was held in Belize from August 17-19, 2009. The workshop was organized by the Belize and Eastern Caribbean Countries offices of PAHO/WHO in collaboration with the Ministry of Health of Belize and the Health Metrics Network (HMN), and the Organization of Eastern Caribbean States.

Its purpose was to share experiences and lessons learned relative to the design and implementation of the BHIS with Barbados, Eastern Caribbean Countries, Jamaica, and Trinidad and Tobago in order to strengthen partnerships and networking among participant countries. Creating and implementing integrated health information systems represents major challenges for both developed and developing countries; however, a harmonized approach to HIS development and implementation may allow developing countries in this and other regions to maximize their investments through understanding and implementing best practices and standards.

*For more information visit the following websites:*

*Belize Ministry of Health website at:* [www.health.gov.bz](http://www.health.gov.bz)

*PAHO/WHO Belize website at:* [www.paho.org/blz](http://www.paho.org/blz)