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# PROCEEDINGS

**First Meeting and Creation of the  
Caribbean Network of Health-Promoting Schools**  
Bridgetown, Barbados, 26-28 November 2001



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## Preface

Networks of Health-Promoting Schools facilitate the exchange of knowledge and experiences of successful implementation of health promotion and health education activities, materials, and tools, both within and among countries. This First Meeting and Creation of the Caribbean Network of Health-Promoting Schools was instrumental in facilitating and strengthening mechanisms for the exchange of knowledge and experiences about school health, to promote the healthy development and learning of young people. It provided an opportunity for participants to discuss priority public health issues affecting school-age children and adolescents and to identify action areas directed to improve the capacity of the school system to effectively promote the health of students, to keep them engaged in education, to promote the health of teachers and other workers in the school setting, and also to support teachers and parents with the responsibility to implement the related projects and activities.

The Caribbean countries have been promoting health education in schools through the CARICOM Health and Family Life Education (HFLE) Program, focussing on strengthening life-skills based approach to health learning in schools, teacher training colleges, and community institutions. The Pan American Health Organization's Regional Health-Promoting Schools Initiative is directed to strengthen the capacity of the education and health sectors to promote the health, learning potential, and well-being of school-age children and adolescents, teachers, and other members of the community, as well as to engage community members in actions directed to improve healthy development at the local level. The Initiative assists education and health sectors and other relevant partners to define school health priorities and to implement actions that facilitate the creation and/or improvement of healthy and supportive physical and psychosocial environments. As such, the Initiative complements, embraces, and expands the work of the HFLE Programs being implemented in the Caribbean Region.

This document reflects the commitments of the countries to be involved in creating the Caribbean Network of Health-Promoting Schools. The countries' summaries of the school health activities, prepared prior to the meeting and following specific guidelines provided for this purpose, provide a valuable source of information for assessing the status and trends of HFLE in the Caribbean, which in itself is a means for sharing experiences of successful school health activities. We trust that this document will be a valuable source of information and will provide baseline data, as the Member States move forward to incorporate the elements of the Health-Promoting Schools Initiative, as a complement to the HFLE activities currently underway in the Caribbean Region.

George A. O. Alleyne  
Director

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## Presentation

The Region of the Americas has achieved significant improvements in health and quality of life, as evidenced by increased life expectancy, access to clean water, and decrease in infant mortality due to infectious diseases. However, Member States continue to struggle to further improve their living conditions and quality of life. To facilitate these efforts, health promotion has been embraced as a powerful public health strategy.

The Caribbean Conference on Health Promotion (Trinidad and Tobago, 1993) endorsed health promotion and protection and reinforced the principles and key areas identified in the Ottawa Charter. As schools have a central role in these efforts, The PAHO/WHO Health-Promoting Schools Regional Initiative has supported efforts to strengthen and expand traditional school health practices through the promotion of joint efforts between the health, education, and other pertinent sectors, as well as parents and communities. These efforts have facilitated strategic planning and implementation of school based health programs, the creation and maintenance of supportive environments, and the provision of health care services and respective referral, healthy meals, psychological counseling, and active living.

A major element of the Initiative has been the creation and development of Networks that take into account the cultural identity of the Member States to provide environments and opportunities to share knowledge and experiences of their models of comprehensive school health. The role of these networks cannot be overemphasized, as these provide the opportunity to meet and discuss all school health related matters, and build and/or strengthen alliances with regional and international agencies and institutions to gain support for and build the capacity of comprehensive school health programs, as the Health and Family Life Education (HFLE) Program.

This First Meeting and Creation of the Caribbean Network of Health-Promoting Schools has provided the opportunity and the space for the exchange of ideas, opinions, experiences, and knowledge, as to discuss possible future collaboration within and among countries. This Proceedings document reflects well the status and trends of school health in the Caribbean and is a solid baseline data to further strengthen school health activities and programs to better the quality of life of schoolchildren in the Caribbean. All participants are to be commended for this significant effort.

María Teresa Cerqueira, PhD  
Director  
Division of Health Promotion  
and Protection

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## Note

The results from the First Meeting and Creation of the Caribbean Network of Health-Promoting Schools (CNHPS), as demonstrated by the richness of the presentations and discussions held throughout this event, and documented in these Proceedings, far exceeded our hope and expectations for this meeting. But this is only the beginning. There is still a long, but certainly promising and exciting road to travel if we want to achieve sustainable and excellent integrated school health programs directed to better the health, well-being, and the quality of life of children and adolescents of the Caribbean Region.

As we distribute these Proceedings throughout the Region, it is our hope that the data contained in this document will be considered and used to strengthen, as well as to expand, school health and related activities and networks. This in turn, we hope, will lead to the planning, implementation, and evaluation of comprehensive and sustainable school health programs, as envisioned by the Health-Promoting Schools Regional Initiative. We also hope that these data will facilitate the planning and conduction of the II Meeting of the Caribbean Network of Health-Promoting Schools, as agreed on November 28, 2001 by the Founding Members of the CNHPS.

As this document is being studied and considered for strengthening and expanding school health programs in the Caribbean Region, it is our expectation that these data will compliment other available information on the HFLE Program and that will facilitate the continued improvement of the education, health, well-being, and quality of life of Caribbean children and adolescents, their teachers and parents, and of other school personnel and surrounding communities.

Josefa Ippolito-Shepherd, PhD  
Regional Health Education Advisor

## Executive Summary

### The First Meeting and Creation of the Caribbean Network of Health-Promoting Schools

On 26-28 November 2001, the Pan American Health Organization/World Health Organization (PAHO/WHO) convened a meeting of Caribbean school health and education professionals. This meeting, held at the PAHO Office of Caribbean Program Coordination (CPC) in Bridgetown, Barbados, brought together key representatives from the Ministries of Health and Education of 14 Caribbean countries, as well as other international and regional experts in the field of school health promotion and health education.

During the three-day meeting, designees from each of the participating Caribbean countries described their countries' status, trends, and experiences in implementing school health programs and activities. Presentations included descriptions and discussions of WHO's school health initiatives worldwide and available methods and surveillance instruments for assessing risk factors in school-age children; the Health-Promoting Schools Initiative in the Americas, aspects of Caribbean life that influence the promotion of health in young people, the evolving role of schools in promoting the health and development, and especially the Health and Family Life Education (HFLE) Program in the Caribbean.

Invited presenters from various international and regional organizations gave presentations on critical issues to consider when implementing strategies and activities, within the context of the Health-Promoting Schools Regional Initiative. These included experiences of Health-Promoting Schools and Networks in Latin America, Spain, Puerto Rico, and Ecuador, in an effort to share the wisdom of other countries and regions that have developed similar initiatives. Key communications strategies used by the Latin American Network were presented, including an innovative program called "Prosamusa" that uses music to teach health and hygiene skills to children in the Andes. The innovative School-Health Promotion initiatives in Spain emphasized the importance of communication and technology to enhance programs and make information-sharing easier. Other presentations included the development of the Caribbean Network of Health-Promoting Schools and school health related activities in Puerto Rico, including the Youth Risk Behavior Surveillance; the development of the Healthy Spaces Project in Loja, Ecuador; and the Rapid Assessment and Action Planning Process (RAAPP), a method to assess countries' capacities to deliver school health programs followed by inter-agency planning and action.

Following the series of country reports and technical presentations, the participants discussed the creation of the Caribbean Network of Health-Promoting Schools (CNHPS). Working first in small work groups, and then with their colleagues at large, the participants formulated the vision, mission, objectives, example activities, terms of reference, plan of action, and an initial organizational structure for the CNHPS, including responsibilities for the CNHPS Focal Point and of the country representatives, and, on 28 November 2001 signed a Statement to establish the CNHPS, and as such the Caribbean Network of Health-Promoting School was created.