

Sharing the “Indigenous Research Evidence” Needed to Inform Health Decision-Making: Trinidad and Tobago hosts its Fourth Annual National Health Research Conference

Shelly-Ann Hunte, Research Fellow, Caribbean Centre for Health Systems Research and Development, The University of the West Indies, St. Augustine

Trinidad and Tobago (T&T) hosts its Fourth Annual National Health Research Conference on November 17, 2023, at the Hyatt Regency Hotel, Port of Spain. The theme is ‘*Healthcare for the Future: Emerging Threats and Sustainable Solutions*’. The conference showcases over 100 presentations of original research conducted by local investigators. They address topical health issues such as Communicable Diseases; Non-communicable Diseases; Mental Health and Quality of Life; Dental Health; Animal Health; Optometry; Education & Training; and Complementary & Alternative Medicine.

It is well established that indigenous/local research evidence and tacit knowledge are key inputs into the decision-making (policymaking, planning and programming, resource allocation, etc.) process. The World Health Organization Evidence Inform Decision-Making (EIDM) framework emphasises that “*local evidence, including observations in a specific setting, administrative data or primary studies, needs to be consulted to take into account modifying factors such as local prevalence of a disease, local perceptions and values, or cost and available resources*”. Furthermore, one of the five transformational changes identified in T&T’s (Vision 2030) National Development Strategy, is a ‘*move to more evidenced-based decision making to attain value for money and reduce the negative impact of costly, ad hoc reactionary policy decisions*’. In the health sector, one key mechanism utilised to support this change is the hosting of annual health research conferences with a primary objective to share research findings and policy-relevant messages with key stakeholders, (Ministries, Regional Health Authorities, health care providers, academic institutions, and the public). Other objectives include strengthening the national health research culture; building research capacity and nurturing junior researchers; and fostering collaboration among researchers at the different institutions.

The Annual Health Research Conference is a collaboration of the main producers and users of research at the national and sub-national levels: Ministry of Health, Tobago House of Assembly, The University of the West Indies, University of Trinidad and Tobago, University of the Southern Caribbean and the Regional Health Authorities. Each insti-

tion had representatives that served assiduously on the Conference Planning Committee.

Trinidad and Tobago has initiated key activities towards understanding, deciphering, expounding, and eventually formalising its evidence ecosystem¹, an important step towards ensuring that decision-making is informed by the best available evidence.

The hosting of its national research conferences is one of these initiatives and is geared towards strengthening the generation and dissemination of local, contextualised research evidence. Also, the country hosted its first Reverse Research Day (RRD) in 2022 and will finalise its first National Health Research Agenda (NHRA) by the end of 2023. The former allowed policymakers to share their research needs with research organisations and academic institutions in order to guide the generation of contextualised evidence needed by policymaking institutions and other policy actors. Another key objective of the RRD was to strengthen the relationship between researchers and policymakers and foster new partnerships. The outputs of the RRD informed the development of the NHRA, which will guide the production and utilisation of research evidence that is aligned to the Priority Areas in the Ministry of Health’s Strategic Plan.

The 2023 National Health Research Conference is well placed to make its contribution to sharing policy-relevant research findings.

¹ ‘A system reflecting the formal and informal linkages and interactions between different actors (and their capacities and resources) involved in the production, translation, and use of evidence’ - Evidence, policy, impact. WHO guide for evidence-informed decision-making. Geneva: World Health Organization; 2021.

Inter-Institution Planning Committee

Many thanks to all members for their invaluable support and contributions toward planning and making the National Health Research Conference a success.

Professor Donald Simeon (Chairperson)

Director
Caribbean Centre for Health Systems Research and Development,
The University of the West Indies, St. Augustine

Dr. Dave Cassie (Co- Chair)

Assistant Professor
Department of Biological Sciences,
University of the Southern Caribbean

Dr. Carla-Maria Alexander

Lecturer
Para-Clinical Sciences,
Faculty of Medical Sciences,
The University of the West Indies, St. Augustine

Mr. Rameez Baksh

Research Officer
North West Regional Health Authority
&
North Central Regional Health Authority

Dr. Stephanie Bhagan

Teaching Assistant
School of Veterinary Medicine,
Faculty of Medical Sciences,
The University of the West Indies, St. Augustine

Dr. Artee Bridgelal-Gonzales

Primary Care Physician II
Eastern Regional Health Authority

Dr. Lydia Campbell-George

Assistant Professor
Department of Nursing Education,
University of the Southern Caribbean

Professor Susan Chand

Dean
School of Social Sciences,
University of the Southern Caribbean

Professor Edward Clarke

Interim Dean
School of Graduate Studies,
University of the Southern Caribbean

Professor Rajiv Dahiya

Professor of Pharmaceutical Chemistry
School of Pharmacy,
The University of the West Indies, St. Augustine

Ms. Alicia Davis-Guerra

Executive Assistant
Tobago Regional Health Authority

Dr. Mona Dillon

Research Officer
Tobago House of Assembly

Dr. Jerome Foster

Senior Lecturer
Pre-Clinical Sciences,
Faculty of Medical Sciences,
The University of the West Indies, St. Augustine

Ms. Kience Frederick

Executive Assistant
Tobago Regional Health Authority

Dr. Samantha Glasgow

Assistant Professor
Health Sciences Unit,
University of Trinidad and Tobago

Ms. Kandace Hackett

Quality Coordinator
Tobago Regional Health Authority

Dr. Patrick Harnarayan

Senior Lecturer
Clinical Surgical Sciences,
Faculty of Medical Sciences,
The University of the West Indies, St. Augustine



Dr. Trudee Hoyte

Lecturer
School of Dentistry,
Faculty of Medical Sciences,
The University of the West Indies, St. Augustine

Ms. Shelly-Ann Hunte

Research Fellow
Caribbean Centre for Health Systems Research
and Development,
The University of the West Indies, St. Augustine

Ms. Marsha Ivey

Associate Dean, Public Relations
Faculty of Medical Sciences,
The University of the West Indies, St. Augustine

Dr. Satish Jankie

Lecturer
School of Pharmacy,
Faculty of Medical Sciences,
The University of the West Indies, St. Augustine

Dr. Junette Mohan

Lecturer
Pre-Clinical Sciences,
Faculty of Medical Sciences,
The University of the West Indies, St. Augustine

Dr. Teola Noel

Assistant Lecturer
School of Veterinary Medicine,
Faculty of Medical Sciences,
The University of the West Indies, St. Augustine

Dr. Shenice Nyack

Teaching Assistant
School of Veterinary Medicine,
Faculty of Medical Sciences,
The University of the West Indies, St. Augustine

Dr. Gavaskar Ramnanansingh

Research Officer
South West Regional Health Authority

Dr. Naveen Seecharan

Lecturer
Clinical Medical Sciences,
Faculty of Medical Sciences,
The University of the West Indies, St. Augustine

Mrs. Althea Sharpe-Johnson

Manager, Quality
Tobago Regional Health Authority

Dr. Claudine Sheppard

Lecturer
School of Nursing,
Faculty of Medical Sciences,
The University of the West Indies, St. Augustine

Dr. Sehlule Vuma

Lecturer
Para-Clinical Sciences,
Faculty of Medical Sciences,
The University of the West Indies, St. Augustine

Dr. Arlene Williams

Lecturer
Para-Clinical Sciences,
Faculty of Medical Sciences,
The University of the West Indies, St. Augustine

Dr. Colwick Wilson

President
University of the Southern Caribbean

Implementation Team

Ms. Jamelia Anthony

Clerical Assistant
Caribbean Centre for Health Systems Research
and Development,
The University of the West Indies, St. Augustine

Mrs. Kershelle Barker

Junior Fellow, Evidence Synthesis
Caribbean Centre for Health Systems Research
and Development,
The University of the West Indies, St. Augustine

Ms. Nikisha Headley

Research Technician
Clinical Surgical Sciences,
Faculty of Medical Sciences,
The University of the West Indies, St. Augustine

Ms. Alissa Moore

Research Assistant
Caribbean Centre for Health Systems Research and
Development,
The University of the West Indies, St. Augustine

Mr. Michal Pierre

Research Assistant
Caribbean Centre for Health Systems Research and
Development,
The University of the West Indies, St. Augustine

Ms. Jenise Tyson

Senior Research Specialist
Directorate Health Policy, Research and Planning,
Ministry of Health