

PAHO/WHO Inputs for SG Report on Resolution 75/214 “Towards the sustainable development of the Caribbean Sea for present and future generations”

This document was prepared by the Pan American Health Organization (PAHO/WHO) in reference to memo UN DESA-2022-00496 which requested inputs for the Secretary General’s report on “*Towards the sustainable development of the Caribbean Sea for present and future generations*” (ref. UNGA Res 75/214).

Within PAHO’s system, this work is guided by the following relevant mandates and action plans: the “Caribbean Cooperation in Health (CCH IV) framework”, the “Caribbean Action Plan on Health and Climate Change”, “PAHO’s Strategic Plan 2020–2025”; the “Agenda for the Americas on Health, Environment, and Climate Change 2021-2030”, the “Sustainable Health Agenda for the Americas 2018– 2030”, among others.

The Caribbean Action Plan on Health and Climate Change, was developed as the framework for guiding the implementation of actions by countries to better understand and address the impacts of climate change on health. As part of the implementation of this Action Plan, PAHO is now coordinating projects with partners, for strengthening climate resilient health systems in the Caribbean.

Among the activities, PAHO/WHO has been facilitating the approach of integrating health into strategic planning and programming through the development of Health chapters in the National Adaptation Plans (H-NAPs) for six countries (Barbados, Belize, Grenada, Haiti, St Lucia, and St Vincent and the Grenadines). These H-NAPs incorporate strategic approaches to ensure ecosystem integrity, build resilience by strengthening mitigation mechanisms to reduce the effects of climate related hazards and environmental change of the region’s ocean and marine systems, in the interface with water and sanitation resilient planning, food safety and security, and strengthening surveillance systems. Alongside this activity, PAHO/WHO-UNFCCC have recently prepared health and climate change country profiles for Antigua and Barbuda, Bahamas, Dominica, Dominican Republic, Grenada, Guyana, Jamaica, Saint Lucia, and Trinidad and Tobago. These profiles summarized the available evidence on climate hazards, health impacts and vulnerabilities, and the progress made thus far by the health sectors in building climate-resilient health systems.

Assessments of impacts from climate change on water and sanitation are also being carried out with support from the Caribbean Public Health Agency (CARPHA). From a capacity building standpoint, Climate Resilient Water and Sanitation Safety Plan training modules were developed and included as a self-learning course on the PAHO virtual campus. Climate change and environment related surveillance, descriptive epidemiology and climate change, and strategies to strengthen the multisector surveillance with a focus on climate change is well incorporated. Additionally, the piloting of two countries for the Climate Resilient Water and Sanitation plans is currently being done and this assessment includes a water and sanitation survey to assess infrastructure, current capacity and potential areas for strengthening/mitigating current and future climate risks and five (5) Countries have participated so far, in the survey, Guyana, Jamaica, St Kitts and Nevis, St. Vincent and the Grenadines, Barbados and two countries will be selected to implement water and sanitation national plans.

Another line of action by PAHO on the Caribbean Sea is related to reducing the potential health impacts of Sargassum seaweed. PAHO secretariat presented a document to all Member States during its 57th Directing Council named “Potential health effects of Sargassum” (PAHO CD57/INF/12). In this document, it is recommended that the secretariat, with Member States

and other stakeholders, should: prepare communication materials to inform about Sargassum health risks and response; increase air quality monitoring and remote sensing capacities to characterize exposure to hydrogen sulfide (H₂S) and ammonia (NH₃) gases linked to Sargassum decomposition, which can cause respiratory and neurological symptoms in exposed populations, among other health effects; implement health surveillance systems to identify health outcomes related to the sargassum decomposition; and foster research towards sustainable removal and use of Sargassum.

Apart from the aforementioned initiatives, there is scope for building synergies relative to the SDG 6, Clean Water and Sanitation, SDG 13 - Climate Action and SDG 14 - Life Below Water. For example, opportunities exist for PAHO/WHO to support countries in the Caribbean region in the reduction of marine pollution and the impact on health and environmental health. This can be done by providing health-related support to giving effect to the health considerations in the 'Organization of Eastern Caribbean States Blue Economy and Action Plan – 2021 -2035'.