

Virtual Health Library Network



A consolidated virtual space for facilitating the access to scientific health information and evidence in Latin American and Caribbean countries

CHALLENGE

Similar to other sectors, decision-making processes in health are more efficient and effective when underscored by quality information sources. However, especially in developing countries, limited accessibility to information often hampers the development of such processes. The democratization of access to and visibility of scientific knowledge in all countries is crucial for the formulation of quality health policies around the globe.

Open and equitable access to information, knowledge and scientific evidence are also essential for the advancement of research, education and health care systems. It is therefore necessary that regional and global strategies are created that contribute to fostering democratic access and effective use of information and up-to-date knowledge.

TOWARDS A SOLUTION

For over two decades, the Virtual Health Library Network (VHL) has been creating, organizing and disseminating information and scientific and technical evidence in the health sector primarily for use in the Latin American and Caribbean region, but also spilling over to other parts of the world, especially Portuguese-speaking countries. This information management model, based on collaborative work and networking in a decentralized system, has improved access to health information and scientific evidence for users in health-related fields, contributing to narrowing the gap between knowledge and practice.

The VHL model, and its methodologies and technologies for the management and operation of information sources and flows, was conceptualized by the Latin American and Caribbean Center on Health Sciences Information of the Pan American Health Organization/World Health Organization (BIREME/

PROJECT NAME

Virtual Health Library Network

NOMINATED BY

The Latin American and Caribbean Center on Health Sciences Information (BIREME), PAHO/WHO

COUNTRIES/REGIONS/TERRITORIES

Argentina, Barbados, Belize, Brazil, Bolivia, Costa Rica, Cuba, Chile, Colombia, Dominica, Dominican Republic, El Salvador, Guatemala, Guyana, Honduras, Haiti, Jamaica, Mexico, Mozambique, Nicaragua, Panama, Paraguay, Peru, Portugal, Puerto Rico, Spain, Suriname, Trinidad and Tobago, Uruguay, Venezuela

SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT GOALS TARGET(S)

3.8, 17.6

SUPPORTED BY

PAHO/WHO and the Ministry of Health of Brazil

IMPLEMENTING ENTITIES

BIREME/PAHO/WHO in coordination with PAHO/WHO Country Offices and National Institutions and the Technical Cooperation Departments, when applicable

PROJECT STATUS

Ongoing

PROJECT PERIOD

1998 – ongoing

LINK

<https://bvsalud.org/>



PAHO/WHO), the regional coordinator of the VHL network. developed the conceptual model of the VHL and the methodologies and technologies for the management and operation of VHL information sources and flows. Moreover, based on the collaborative network model, with decentralized operation, the VHL is developed by health institutions that share responsibility for producing and publishing the contents that are available through the VHL Portals. The content is generated, selected and systematized by a network of institutions and information professionals. In partnership with BIREME/PAHO/WHO, national institutions facilitate and coordinate permanent events and forums for sharing information, knowledge and experiences that can be referenced from one country to another and boost effective cooperation in capacity building at local, regional and global levels.

BIREME promotes exchange between producers, intermediaries and users of health information at the VHL and offers technical cooperation for the development of national capacities for the management and operation of a VHL instance. The VHL methodologies and technologies are available to any institution or organization that intends to construct a VHL based on the principles of the VHL model. The collective nature of the project ensures that the VHL operates autonomously and can continue operating throughout different national contexts, constituting a public good. To evaluate instances of the VHL Network in the adoption of methodologies, technologies and good practices recommended in its guide (<http://red.bvsalud.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/11/EN-opas-guia-bvs-2021-p3-v3.pdf>), a structure of evolution at successive levels was developed. The passage through every level is necessary to reach full maturity in the adoption of the VHL Model. The evaluation process is done through self-assessment.

The technical feasibility of the VHL model and its sustainability has been ascertained by 24 years of uninterrupted activity and 67 VHL instances (at national, thematic, institutional and regional levels), many of them developed independently, based on the principles established by BIREME, with its support and periodical advice. The VHL cooperation network has more than 2,000 participants and the VHL system is being applied and used by 30 countries in Latin America and the Caribbean, Portugal, Spain and Mozambique. It is in use in the ePORTUGUESe network for Portuguese speaking countries. The English-speaking Caribbean countries also have a sub-regional initiative, the MedCarib network, that provides visibility and dissemination of health information produced by and with a focus on the Caribbean.

The VHL has been recognized as a novel and innovative approach to provide low- and middle-income countries with quality information and knowledge in health through South-South cooperation in a short time and with a very low budget. The VHL Network contributes to SDG 3 (good health and well-being); SDG 4 (quality education); SDG 10 (reduced inequalities); and SDG 17 (partnerships for the goals).

The democratization of access to and visibility of scientific knowledge on health in countries is the project's most important achievement. By 2021, the VHL Regional Portal registered around 21 million sessions and 59 million pageviews, accessing a collection of 33+ million bibliographic records, of which 15+ million are available in full text. In 2021 alone, more than 12.5 million users from countries around the world accessed the VHL via the Regional Portal (<http://bvsalud.org>).

The VHL Model can be applied and replicated and its methodology and technology are openly available at: <http://red.bvsalud.org/modelo-bvs/en/>.

CONTACT INFORMATION

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