Embedding Research for the Sustainable Development Goals
STRENGTHENING HEALTH PROGRAMS, POLICIES AND SYSTEMS IN LATIN AMERICA AND THE CARIBBEAN

Concept Note Due: 15 May 2018

Joint call for proposals: Pan American Health Organization (PAHO), the Alliance for Health Policy and Systems Research (Alliance HPSR) and the UNICEF/UNDP/World Bank/WHO Special Programme for Research and Training in Tropical Diseases (TDR)

Background

Embedding Research for the Sustainable Development Goals (ER-SDG) focuses on the system level changes that are required to improve health, programs, policies and systems. This call for proposals is a joint initiative between the Pan American Health Organization (PAHO), the Alliance for Health Policy and Systems Research (Alliance HPSR) and the Special Programme for Research and Training in Tropical Diseases (TDR).

Since embedded research is conducted in real world settings, we need to make sure that research questions originate from people working at the front-line of health matters rather than topics researchers themselves may suggest. Embedded research shines a light on context-specific factors to real world health program, policy and system decisions – including implementation of health interventions - identified by people working within health systems. Research embedded in decision making fosters the integration of scientific inquiry into the implementation problem-solving process, along with programs, policy and system-level improvements in an iterative and continuous manner.\(^1, \)\(^2\)

Our conception of embedded research involves leadership of the key stakeholders involved in policy generation and/or program management, i.e. implementers at the forefront of specific implementation problems as well as the contexts in which they occur. Examples of such individuals include program managers, district health officers and front-line health workers.

This new call thus focuses on programs, policies and systems, including but not limited to issues of implementation, addressing the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). We encourage applicants to submit a concept note, using the template provided, regarding a program, policy or system-level problem related to the SDGs, focusing on but not limited to SDG 3: Ensure healthy lives and promote wellbeing for all at all ages, and SDG 10: Reduce inequalities within and among countries.

About the Grant

The initiative Embedding Research for the Sustainable Development Goals works with country teams to identify gaps in capacity, barriers to efficient functioning and effective performance of the health systems and methods by which resources can be utilized optimally. The ER-SDG initiative will focus on developing contextualized knowledge bases, convening dialogues and strengthening capacities, in order to facilitate associations between researchers and users of research findings.
Health policy and systems challenges to be considered can be inter-sectoral and address a wide array of issues. We are accepting applications on any topic (i.e. communicable diseases, noncommunicable diseases, child and maternal health, emergency preparedness and disaster relief, among others) related to the SDGs from low- and middle-income countries of Latin America and the Caribbean. We are specifically encouraging submissions from Bolivia, Guatemala, Guyana, Haiti, Honduras, Nicaragua, Paraguay and Suriname.

Examples of previous selected projects include:

- Implementation of a drug interchangeability policy
- Program for the prevention and control of tuberculosis in the incarcerated population
- Building opportunities for regionalization as a strategy to improve the capacity of the health system to respond to the maternal child care
- Critical path of women affected by Zika and the exercise of their sexual and reproductive rights

Objectives of the program:

1. Support the improvement of existing health programs, policies and systems in accordance with local settings
2. Provide insights on health program, policy and system level failures underlying implementation problems
3. Stimulate partnerships and strengthen capacity of stakeholders
4. Undergo a health policy and systems research study to assess barriers and facilitators of program, policy and system level implementation
5. Integrate research findings from the health policy and systems research study in order to improve the implementation of health programs/policies and functioning of the overall health system
6. Monitoring and evaluation of health program, policy and system improvements

Activities of the grant:

Following selection of the grant recipients, country teams led by a decision-maker will develop a protocol to conduct health policy and systems research. The grant places the decision-maker/implementer in the position of principal investigator and leader of the research project. The protocol will be developed through a training workshop convened by PAHO, Alliance HPSR, TDR and a regional technical assistance centre. Collaboration of researchers/research institutions with the public health sector is encouraged.

The protocol is required to be submitted to and receive approval from a local-level ethics review committee (local or national level) and also from PAHO’s Ethics Review Committee before the initiation of the research project. PAHO, Alliance HPSR, and TDR will work with the selected teams to refine the research question and methodology and, as a result, the protocol is likely to be modified during the course of the training.

Subsequently, grantees will initiate data collection activities within their respective study sites. Following the collection of data, a second workshop will focus on data analysis and interpretation. This workshop will include training to strengthen the grantees’ capacity to analyse the collected data and synthesize the results for the integration of findings into the decision making process.
Technical assistance will be provided throughout the activities to ensure the production of valid and relevant research results and assist in the integration of results into the health program, policy and/or system.

Rules & Guidelines

Eligibility: Low- and middle-income countries are eligible for this call for proposals. The principal investigator must be from a public health institution in Latin America and/or the Caribbean. Universities and private institutions are not eligible to apply as principal investigators. Funding should not be used to pay for additional staff within the program, policy or system. Funding may be used to cover the costs of researchers’ time, data collection and analysis and other related research activities. Applicants must submit an official letter of support from the public institution sponsoring their project.

Applications must include a decision-maker (principal investigator) and can include a co-applicant as a researcher.

We anticipate awarding grants of $30 000 (United States dollars)

Evaluation Criteria: A concept note should be submitted, using the template provided (11 pt font).

Submissions received by the deadline will be evaluated on the following criteria:

- A clear goal articulated in terms of how the program, policy or system-level failure can be improved through health policy and systems research
- Demonstrated evidence of effective engagement to support evidence-informed decision making;
- Support and readiness of the institution(s) to ensure successful implementation of the project;
- Evidence of a strong technical understanding of the proposed subject matter;
- Capacity to conduct health policy and systems research; and
- Willingness to use the results in improving the policies, programs or systems

How to Apply

Submit your application by email to healthevidence@paho.org. You must complete the Call for Proposals template in order for your application to be accepted.

When submitting your application, please include the following information in the subject line of your message: Institution Name_ Last name (of principal investigator)

Contact information

Please contact healthevidence@paho.org if you have any questions.

Activities & Timeline

RFP published: 11 April 2018
Applications deadline: 15 May 2018
Anticipated award and work start: 15 June 2018
Application instructions
