

# Access to Health Information

*A global review of progress, lessons learned and ways forward*

*Providing access to reliable health information for health workers in developing countries is potentially the single most cost-effective and achievable strategy for sustainable improvement in health care.*

British Medical Journal 1997;314:90

Equitable and universal access to healthcare and health research information is recognised in the recent draft 'World Report on Knowledge for Better Health' as an important part of worldwide strategies to reduce global disparities in health and achieve the health-related Millennium Development Goals.

The report argues that 'access to relevant, reliable and up-to-date health and health research information [in] the developing world must be improved and must take into account the needs of diverse groups of constituencies and stakeholders'.

Involving the wider community in a global review of health information access is one of the key recommendations of a recent position paper commissioned by WHO: 'Improving access to information in developing countries' (Fiona Godlee *et al*, April 2004) This paper calls for a multi-agency initiative to ensure **universal access to health information by 2015**, and emphasizes that achievement of this goal will depend critically on the ability of all stakeholders to work together towards a shared vision. A short version is being published in *The Lancet* in July 2004.

Drawing from these and similar experiences, INASP and other organisations have joined forces in a review of what has been achieved in health information access and provision, what works and what doesn't.

The review will draw on past experience and current perspectives as a basis for future action. It will be comprehensive and inclusive, using discussion, feedback and ideas from providers and users of information worldwide. The review will mobilise, engage and galvanise key stakeholder groups in the health information field, with a view to reviewing and synthesising lessons learned and developing a shared agenda for the future.

## Who is involved?

Participating agencies currently include: Association for Health Information and Libraries in Africa, BIREME (Latin American and Caribbean Centre on Health Sciences Information), *BMJ*, The Cochrane Collaboration, Exchange, Forum for African Medical Editors, Global Forum for Health Research, Interactive Health Network, International e-Health Association, *The Lancet*, Society for the Internet in Medicine, South Asian Public Health Forum, University of Papua New Guinea, Wellcome Trust, World Health Organization, and the WHO Eastern Mediterranean Regional Office. The review is facilitated by INASP.

The review will be formally launched at the British Medical Association, London, 12 July 2004

## How will it work?

- ❑ **Face-to-face meetings:** conferences already scheduled for 2004–2005 will each generate a part-review that is specific to their area of interest (professional and/or geographical):

Conference	Venue	Date
<b>Global Review of Access to Health Information (Launch meeting)</b> , British Medical Association	London, UK	12 July 2004
Health Information Forum: Sharing knowledge on reproductive health	London, UK	28 September 2004
eHealth 2004	London, UK	30 September - 1 October 2004
Cochrane Colloquium	Ottawa, Canada	2-6 October 2004
AHILA Congress (Association for Health Information and Libraries in Africa)	Blantyre, Malawi	25-29 October 2004
Senegal AHILA: 'Health information priorities in Senegal'	Dakar, Senegal	October 2004
4th Regional Conference on Eastern Mediterranean Region Health Sciences Virtual Library	Cairo, Egypt	9-11 November 2004
Global Forum for Health Research/World Summit on Health Research	Mexico City, Mexico	16-20 November 2004
Health Information Forum: Videoconference with health information forums in developing countries	London-Nairobi-Dakar-Washington DC – your country?	30 November 2004
MEDNET 2004: 9th World Congress of Medicine in Internet	Buenos Aires, Argentina	5-7 December, 2004
Medical Library Association Annual Meeting	San Antonio, USA	13-18 May 2005
7th Regional Congress on Health Sciences Information	Salvador, Brazil	September 2005
9th International Congress of Medical Librarians	Salvador, Brazil	September 2005

- ❑ **Email discussion:** we are engaging the full range of stakeholders on the global email forum, HIF-net at WHO, an open platform with more than 1400 members committed to health information access, from 130 countries worldwide.
- ❑ **Publications:** A discussion paper will be published in The Lancet on 10 July 2004. This will be followed by a series of publications drawing from the dialogue above.

## Budget

Most of the components are already in place with their own funding. Modest additional funding is required for:

- Coordination
- Support for developing country events
- Sponsorship for attendance by developing-country speakers
- Editing, translation, synthesis.

We welcome your participation and expressions of interest to collaborate.

**For further details, see <http://www.inasp.info/health>**

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