

# Central American Network for Disaster and Health Information (CANDHI)

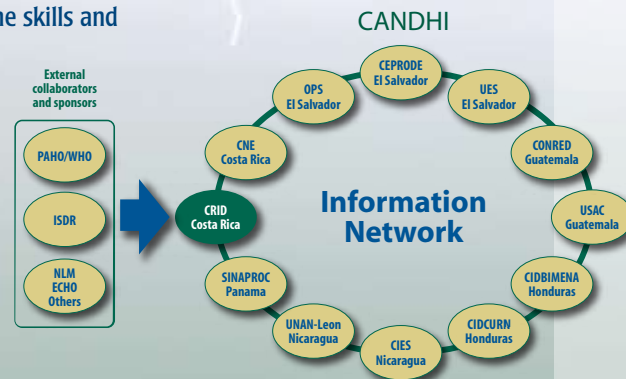


**T**he Central American Network for Disaster and Health Information (CANDHI) is a group of public health, medical, and disaster libraries working together to enhance information management capacities with a goal of contributing to disaster preparedness, response, and reduction (<http://www.candhi.org>). Following Hurricane Mitch in 1998 and two earthquakes in El Salvador in 2001, it was apparent that radical changes were needed to improve national capacities in disaster preparedness, mitigation, and response. Access to relevant and reliable information was a requirement for all of these activities.



In 2001, the National Library of Medicine (NLM), the Pan American Health Organization (PAHO), and the United Nations International Strategy for Disaster Reduction (ISDR) sought to strengthen the health information infrastructure in Central America by providing financial and technical support to the Regional Disaster Information Center for Latin America and the Caribbean (Spanish acronym, CRID) to help countries collect, organize, and disseminate information on disasters.

The program created 11 disaster health information centers in medical libraries and disaster-related organizations in 6 countries, now connected as the CANDHI network. The centers now have the skills and resources to organize and disseminate information including technological infrastructure, information management techniques, and product development experience (digital libraries, Web sites). For more than 6 years, CANDHI has helped build institutional capacity to facilitate disaster preparedness activities.



## Program Goals

Support and improve the health information infrastructure in Central America.

## Background

### Preceding Events

#### Hurricane Mitch—October 1998

- US Government pledged support to rebuild Central America
- NLM offered assistance to public health and medical libraries in the hardest hit countries of Honduras and Nicaragua

#### Earthquakes in El Salvador—January/February 2001

Added El Salvador to the program after two major earthquakes hit shortly after the start of the program

### Focus on Information

Managing disasters is managing information; reliable information is the most valued commodity before and after a disaster (*quote from Dr. Mirta Roses Periago, Director, Pan American Health Organization*).

- Increased need and demand for information by disaster personnel (planners, emergency responders, governments, etc.)
- Gray literature: a wealth of information produced, but little is easily accessible
- Access to reliable information is vital to disaster preparedness, response, and reduction



## CANDHI Centers

### Program Coordinator

Regional Disaster Information Center for Latin America and the Caribbean (Spanish acronym, CRID)

- Mission: create a disaster prevention culture through the collection and dissemination of information
- Located in San José, Costa Rica

### Participating Centers

#### Honduras

National Medical Library of Honduras, National Autonomous University of Honduras, Tegucigalpa

North Region University Center, San Pedro Sula

#### Nicaragua

Medical Library, National Autonomous University of Nicaragua, León

Public Health Library, Health Research and Education Center, Managua

#### El Salvador

Documentation Center of the Ministry of Health and the Pan American Health Organization, San Salvador

Center for the Protection Against Disasters, San Salvador

Medical Library, University of El Salvador, San Salvador

#### Guatemala

Medical Library, University of San Carlos, Guatemala City

National Coordinator for Disaster Reduction, Guatemala City

#### Costa Rica

National Emergency Commission, San José

#### Panama

National Civil Protection System, Panama City



### Program Sponsors

#### Technical and Financial Support

National Library of Medicine  
Pan American Health Organization  
United Nations International Strategy for Disaster Reduction

#### Financial Support

UK Department for International Development (Guatemala)  
European Community Humanitarian Organization (Costa Rica and Panama)

## CANDHI Development

An international network of libraries and information centers for disaster information

Participating libraries and information centers received support to modernize their institutions:

- Technology infrastructure
- Information management
- Information product development
  - Digital Library—Free, full-text library of more than 12,000 documents from across the CANDHI centers
  - CD ROMs—CDs of full-text documents on selected topics
  - Disaster Information Center Web site for each participating center and the program



## CANDHI Activities

- Provide information services to many agencies and organizations
- Educate disaster managers and the general public about disaster information resources
- Incorporate disaster medicine into public health and medical school curricula
- Serve on national disaster committees
- Participate in international cooperation efforts
- Develop sustainable methodology to maintain disaster information centers
- Develop a Disaster Information Center Toolkit
- Expand to other regions of the world
  - South America (in development)
  - Southeast Asia (under discussion)

## Conclusion

CANDHI is a model for disseminating health information in underserved, disaster-prone environments and managing gray literature related to disasters.

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