



Canadian Society for International Health A Canadian Voice for Global Health

La Société Canadienne de Santé Internationale

Croatia Health Systems Project 1999-2004

In the 1990s, in an effort to develop a more effective, efficient, and financially sustainable health system, the Croatian government accepted loans from the International Bank for Reconstruction and Development for its Health Systems Projects. These loans were used to:

- Introduce pilot delivery systems improvements and a national heart disease program;
- Strengthen public/primary health activities and policies;
- Develop policy options that would increase the sector's financial sustainability;
- Improve and expand the health information systems;
- Dispose of outdated and unusable pharmaceuticals.

CSIH was selected to implement three related components of the Health Systems Projects. The first two components contributed to reforming the hospital sector; this included recommending adjustments in the mix, number, and scale of hospital and secondary care facilities and their clinical programs to ensure that health services could and would meet the needs of Croatia's population in clinically appropriate and economically sustainable ways.

Through the *Categorization of Hospital and Other Secondary Care Facilities* component, CSIH developed frameworks to categorize, license, and accredit hospitals, and to then implement information systems that would support the categorization and accreditation. Categorization and accreditation addressed issues related to clinical programs, human resources, infrastructure, equipment, finances, and information systems. The *Human Resources for Health Information System Management* component focused on the development of a health information system framework that would support the categorization and accreditation.

The *Public Health Surveys and National Health Promotion* component aimed to develop public health strategies to reduce the prevalence of heart disease. CSIH provided technical assistance and training to the Croatian Institute for Public Health and to selected local/regional institutes and partner institutions to enhance human and institutional capacity to (i) improve and expand the public health information system; (ii) lead national policy and activity efforts in health promotion with emphasis on cardiovascular disease prevention; (iii) plan and provide cardiovascular disease (CVD) risk reduction, clinical prevention, and emergency care; and (iv) promote healthier lifestyles among the general population with emphasis on smoking prevention and cessation.

This component began with the design and conduct of a Croatian Adult Health Household Survey to assist with health monitoring and program development. The survey included respondents in each region to benchmark for local regional/local planning and evaluation, and was the first national adult survey with



scientifically valid regionally representative data conducted at the household level in Croatia. Following the survey, CSIH organized a series of training sessions to impart the importance of the survey results and how the information could be used to develop health promotion policy.

CSIH then addressed health promotion at the national level by designing and conducting training on population health, health promotion, and public health, as well as library science, information technology, and clinical science. In order to help increase the information resource capacity, Canadian and local consultants developed a plan for a national reference library, and adapted clinical protocols and guidelines from Canadian, American, and European sources. CSIH also designed, implemented, and evaluated regional training workshops on cardiovascular emergencies, targeting emergency room physicians, nurses, PHC teams on call duty and ambulance staff. Finally, CSIH developed public media campaigns in print, radio and television to promote healthier lifestyles.

During its implementation of the three components, CSIH utilized a "Training-of-Trainers" (TOT) approach, by which CSIH experts provided skills-building to local experts, who in turn developed the capacity to carry on and replicate the training with increasingly less Canadian technical assistance.

The successful completion of this project required the development and maintenance of a wide-range of institutional relationships. CSIH strengthened relationships between the Ministry of Health, the National Institute for Public Health, the new regional Institutes for Public Health, and the Andrija Stampar School of Public Health. It collaborated with international stakeholders, including WHO, UNICEF and the EU. In addition, the public health/health promotion activities involved a variety of stakeholders at the clinical intervention level, including medical specialists, general practitioners, nurses, the Ministry of Health, various medical chambers/medical associations, international bodies from which the protocols and guidelines were adopted (EU-AGREE), and other international organizations such as the WHO.

The following results were noted by the end of the project:

- Effective reform of the hospital sector included new approaches to categorize facilities and services, accredit facilities, and assure quality; improved skills and capacity to help policy makers and health professionals categorize and accredit hospitals; improved data and information systems; and the development of protocols and guidelines to support reform.
- Regional health services planning related to cardiovascular disease became more cost effective, while evidence-based resource allocation and the resulting programme development for CVD was improved through the utilization and dissemination of regionally representative health survey data.
- Croatian professionals were better informed on how to use survey data for program planning, resource allocation, and program evaluation.
- Enhanced capacity of local health professionals to train others in public health and health promotion at the national and regional levels, and ultimately improved services.



In October 2006, the Canadian Society for International Health has been awarded the Canadian International Cooperation Award for improvement of social infrastructure for their Public Health Strengthening in Guyana Project.

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