

Executive Report

BIREME: Promoting Health in Latin America and the Caribbean through Scientific Information

(13th Session of the Advisory Committee of BIREME, August 29, 2024)

Summary

BIREME, as a PAHO/WHO entity associated with the Department of Evidence and Intelligence for Action in Health (EIH), acts as a digital library specializing in the scientific and technical production of Latin America and the Caribbean in the health sciences. Its mission is to promote health through access to scientific and technical information. Its focus is on technical cooperation with countries to establish Virtual Health Libraries and other products, services and information systems aimed at bibliographic control, indexing, archiving and the development of digital platforms for searching and retrieving scientific and technical health information.

Founded in 1967, BIREME has stood out as a center of expertise in health promotion in Latin America and the Caribbean. In 2024, the institution celebrated 57 years of continuous operation, with the Virtual Health Library (VHL) as its main program, recognized for its cooperation practices between countries, including UNOSSC, the United Nations Agency for South-South Cooperation.

BIREME has been implementing its Strategy 2023-2025, aligned with PAHO's strategic objectives and the current scenario of global digital transformation. The Strategy places the user at the center of the development of information products, prioritizing the strengthening of decision-making capacities in health and the adoption of advanced technologies to expand access, personalize and virtualize digital libraries. BIREME's 2024-2025 Biannual Work Plan (BWP) seeks to give materiality to the Strategy 2023-2025 and includes strategic initiatives covering information management, high-quality services, health intelligence and global technical cooperation.

BIREME continues to be a beacon for health promotion in Latin America and the Caribbean. With health information products that advance in scope and impact, BIREME supports informed decision-making, strengthens health systems and contributes to reducing health inequalities. Its networking, involving institutions from across the region, demonstrates the potential of South-South cooperation, innovation and continuous development towards health for all.

Summary in up to 200 taps: BIREME, for 57 years promoting health in Latin America and the Caribbean with innovation and technical cooperation in scientific information. #HealthForAll #SouthSouthCooperation #HealthInnovation

BIREME: Promoting Health in Latin America and the Caribbean through Scientific Information

1. Introduction

Founded in 1967 in São Paulo, Brazil, as the Regional Library of Medicine, BIREME became the Latin American and Caribbean Center on Health Sciences Information in 1982. Celebrating 57 years of operation in 2024, BIREME maintains its mission to promote health through access to scientific and technical information. BIREME's main technical cooperation and information program, the Virtual Health Library (VHL), completed 26 years of activity with an ecosystem of products, services and information systems that includes more than 60 digital libraries and other solutions. With thematic, local, national, regional and global libraries, the VHL was recently recognized as a good practice in South-South cooperation by UNOSSC, the United Nations Office for South-South Cooperation. In this sense, BIREME's technical cooperation focuses on giving visibility to technical and scientific health information generated in or relevant to Latin America and the Caribbean, developing capacities for evidence-based decisions, strengthening knowledge management, translating knowledge, supporting the definition of research priorities, and implementing platforms that integrate and manage research data, facilitating access to critical information for health in the region.

1.1 BIREME's new Institutional Structure (CD49.R5)

In 2009, the PAHO Directing Council approved resolution CD49.R5, establishing a new institutional structure for BIREME, which is still being implemented. A key pending issue is the Headquarters Agreement in Brazil, which will outline the responsibilities of the Government of Brazil in maintaining BIREME, as well as defining the privileges and immunities of the Center. At present, there is a joint mobilization of efforts between the Ministries of Foreign Affairs and Health, together with PAHO, to implement this agreement, which is essential to strengthen BIREME's operations and technical cooperation, and to guarantee its financial, institutional and technical sustainability both in Brazil and in the region.

1.2 Role of BIREME's Advisory Committee and Scientific Committee

BIREME's Governance Committees play a key role in the Center's ongoing operation and development. The Advisory Committee (AC) and the Scientific Committee (SC) provide strategic guidance and technical support to ensure that BIREME's activities are aligned with regional and global health priorities. The AC, composed of representatives from member countries, reviews and approves work plans and budgets, while the SC, formed by eminent experts, assesses the technical quality of BIREME's products and services. Together, these committees have driven the development of the Center since 2010 and more recently the

implementation of the BIREME Strategy 2023-2025, promoting innovation, ensuring the relevance of the actions developed and strengthening BIREME's position as a reference center for information for action in health in Latin America and the Caribbean.

1.3 Strategy 2023-2025

Recommended for implementation by the AC of BIREME in August 2023, the Strategy 2023-2025 aims to facilitate BIREME's transition to information products and services 4.0 and contribute to the realization of PAHO's Five Pillar Vision, especially the "*PAHO Forward*" pillar. The strategy is based on PAHO's programmatic priorities and identifies four priority areas of work: (1) strengthening the capacity of people and communities to make health decisions; (2) increasing the decision-making capacity of professionals; (3) supporting the development of health policies; and (4) supporting health research.

The implementation of Strategy 2023-2025 has been progressing gradually at the Center, with the definition of research and development priorities (including the incorporation of language models, the personalization of digital libraries, and the creation of virtualized digital spaces). In addition, new projects have been designed to meet the strategic needs of the countries and the Organization, with the 2024-2025 Work Plan aimed at achieving these goals. BIREME also began adopting agile solutions in product management, using the Scrum framework to increase efficiency and responsiveness to the demands of the region.

2. Biannual Work Plan (BWP)

BIREME's Biannual Work Plan (BWP) for 2024-2025 was developed in alignment with the PAHO/WHO Strategic Plan 2020-2025, the Sustainable Health Agenda for the Americas (SHAA 2030), the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) of the 2030 Agenda and the BIREME Strategy 2023-2025. Approved by PAHO's Executive Management in 2023, the BWP 24-25 encompasses four main initiatives and approximately 75 projects, products and services, aimed at achieving eight Immediate and Intermediate Outcomes of the PAHO/WHO Strategic Plan. BWP 2024-2025 is in the process of being fully implemented.

2.1 Summary of BIREME's Initiatives, Products and Services

2.1.1 Initiative BIR.01: Information and Knowledge Management

In 2024, the VHL maintained its regular operation, providing access to more than 60 information sources and accumulating more than 38 million citations of scientific and technical documents. LILACS, meanwhile, reached 1.07 million documentary records, with 61% of the records containing links to full texts. It is estimated that there are just over two million bibliographic references (citations), corresponding to the entire scientific production of Latin America and the Caribbean indexed in bibliographic databases. Approximately 50% of this production is indexed in global databases, such as MEDLINE (a bibliographic database of the *National Library of Medicine*), while LILACS contains the other 50% of this production. All of this production is integrated in the VHL. These data confirm the importance of LILACS and the VHL for the availability, visibility and use of scientific production from Latin America and

the Caribbean, and reflect BIREME's commitment to ensuring continuous and up-to-date access to essential health information.

2.1.2 Initiative BIR.02: Information Services

The development and maintenance of high quality information services remains a priority for BIREME. In the first half of 2024, there were around 13.4 access sessions from nine million users, resulting in about 27.7 million page views, highlighting the importance of the Regional Portal as an indispensable resource for health professionals and researchers. In addition, significant improvements have been made to the Regional Portal and the e-BlueInfo platform, among other products, making it easier for health professionals to access critical information, especially in the context of primary care.

2.1.3 Initiative BIR.03: Intelligence in Health Sciences Information

BIREME has excelled in applying new technologies and data analysis to improve health information management. As of July 2024, more than 50 Evidence Maps have been produced and published in the VHL with the participation of groups of researchers from different areas. These maps and other initiatives, such as the Windows of Knowledge, have been key to supporting informed health decision-making by providing a clear and accessible view of the best scientific evidence available.

2.1.4 Initiative BIR.04: BIREME Leadership and Management (Technical Cooperation and Global Alliances)

Strengthening technical cooperation with countries in the region and global alliances continues to be a central component of BIREME's work. In 2024, the development of the Global Library of Traditional Medicine began, in partnership with the WHO Global Center for Traditional Medicine. Since 2023, BIREME has been working in global collaboration with this Center and the WHO Traditional Medicine Unit to establish the Global Library of Traditional Medicine. This effort was preceded by the development of the VHL TCIM Americas (TCIM - Traditional, Complementary and Integrative Medicine), a collection of maps and a digital platform for the 1st WHO Global Summit on Traditional Medicine, held in Jamnagar, India, in 2023. BIREME maintains its collaboration with the WHO Library and the knowledge management focal points in the other regions for the continued operation and development of the Global Medical Index.

A non-exhaustive list of BIREME's advances in 2023-2024 is presented in Table 1.

Table 1: BIREME advances in 2023-2024 (non-exhaustive list)

Area	Main advances
Virtual Health Library (VHL)	Regular operation of the regional portal, with access to 60 information sources and almost 38.2 million citations. In the first semester of 2024, the portal recorded more than 13 million sessions, 9 million users and 28 million page views.
LILACS	Continuous updating with more than 17,000 new records in the first semester of 2024, totaling 1.093 million records, 61% with a link to the full text. Contributions were received from 211 cooperating centers in 19 AL&C countries.
DeCS/MeSH	Publication of the 2024 Edition, with 394 new descriptors, including 311 originating from MeSH and 83 created in exclusive DeCS categories. The DeCS/MeSH portal recorded more than 4.1 million sessions and 42 million page views in the first semester of 2024. The DeCS/MeSH Finder was used by 31,000 users from 86 countries.
Meetings and Training	Technical meetings held to strengthen the VHL and discuss alignment with BIREME Strategy 2023-2025, which were attended by 80 participants from 21 countries. Three training sessions on indexing and two sessions on Good Practices were held at the first semester of 2024, with the participation of several AL&C countries, Spain and Portugal.
Global Partnerships and Collaborations	Development of the Global Library of Traditional Medicine, and operation of the Global Index Medicus with more than 2.5 million references and access by more than 278,000 users. Support for the ProEthos platform and management of the COVID-19 database with over 877,000 documents and 5,364,000 users.
Traditional, Complementary and Integrative Medicine (TCIM)	Promotion of the VHL TCIM Americas at the 1st WHO Global Summit on Traditional Medicine, development of a portal for the exhibition of 65 electronic posters and publication of two Windows of Knowledge on Traditional Medicine and Ethnicity and Health.
Decision Support Tools	Development of a portal for clinical decision support resources (BIGG, BIGG-REC, BIGG-Map), prototype of a graphic tool for developing algorithms based on clinical guidelines, and continuous updating of EVID@Easy.
Evidence Maps and Knowledge Showcases	Publication of three new Evidence Maps in the first semester of 2024, totaling 58 Maps, and regular operation of the Windows of Knowledge Portal with 58 Windows registered.
Projects with the Brazilian Ministry of Health	Development of new programs such as the New Second Formative Opinion and the Decision Aids System, resumption of the Interinstitutional Health Information Network (RIPSA) and operation of the RIPSA portal.
Operational Strengthening and Strategy 2023-2025	Progress in the implementation of the Strategy 2023-2025, progress towards the formalization of the Headquarters Agreement in Brazil, and effective management of BIREME's operations with a focus on internal and external communication, Information and Communication Technology and skills development, including the formation of a group to implement the Scrum framework, with the start of the first projects using this approach.

3. Financial and Operational Sustainability

Financial sustainability and operational efficiency remain strategic priorities for BIREME. In the first half of 2024 and in 2023, continuous efforts were made to diversify funding sources to ensure the long-term viability of BIREME's operations. The implementation of the Strategy 2023-2025 included the modernization of the IT infrastructure and the adoption of agile methodologies, such as Scrum, to strengthen project management and the quality of the products and services offered. A team was formed to support the implementation of Scrum at BIREME, and in 2024 the first projects using the Scrum framework began to be implemented.

4. Human Capital and Cooperative Work

BIREME's intellectual capital consists of a team experienced in information management, development of methodologies and technologies for managing scientific and technical data, and a robust administrative infrastructure. The team is composed of staff associated with PAHO/WHO and *Hospital São Paulo/Associação Paulista para Desenvolvimento da Medicina* (HSP/SPDM), totaling 40 professionals. Under the Strategy 2023-2025, BIREME has adopted a new organizational chart, which includes an Innovation Laboratory, two technical departments and a project and administration department, reinforcing its commitment to the modernization and innovation of its services. BIREME maintains a Human Resources Plan aligned with PAHO/WHO strategic planning, ensuring transparency and institutional commitment. This plan is complemented by a network of more than 40 consultants and specialists who support the development of projects, products and information services, contributing to the institution's flexibility and responsiveness. One of BIREME's strong points is its collaborative network, which includes around 800 institutions in 30 countries. This network facilitates the exchange of ideas, experiences and knowledge, as well as allowing the expansion and inclusion of new members, strengthening management and information sharing.

5. CRICS - Regional Congress on Health Sciences Information

BIREME is coordinating the 11th edition of the Regional Congress on Health Sciences Information (CRICS11), together with the 8th Coordination Meeting of the VHL (VHL8), both events scheduled for December 2025. In 2025, these events will discuss the digital transformation of information science and libraries, with an emphasis on incorporating language models, personalizing content, virtualizing digital libraries and managing digital collections using artificial intelligence (AI). Since its first edition in 1992, CRICS has established itself as one of the most important international conferences in the field of scientific and technical information, regularly addressing the state of the art in information, knowledge and the management of scientific evidence. VHL8, which will precede CRICS11, will serve as the main forum for exchanging experiences and evaluating the development of the VHL at regional and institutional levels. The two events will be held in collaboration with local, national and international institutions, and will be an opportunity to share progress and strengthen collaborative networks, especially after the hiatus caused by the Covid-19 pandemic.

6. Final considerations

BIREME continues to be a beacon of health promotion for all in Latin America and the Caribbean. BIREME's health information products have continued to grow in number and scope, providing essential scientific and technical information for health decision-making. Approximately 50% of the region's indexed scientific production is in the LILACS database, while the VHL integrates several databases and provides broad access to the scientific production of Latin America and the Caribbean. BIREME's networking, involving institutions and health professionals throughout the region, ensures efficient operations, even in the face of challenges such as the Covid-19 pandemic. Over the years, BIREME has increased the visibility of regional scientific production, keeping the DeCS vocabulary updated in four languages and ensuring adherence to the highest international standards. The institution excels in training human resources and developing local capacities for the production and management of health information, essential actions for the implementation of global, regional, subregional and national projects. Even in the face of significant challenges, BIREME has demonstrated resilience and adaptability, implementing its technical cooperation program, maintaining its operations, and achieving the expected results set out in its work plans. By promoting access to and use of scientific and technical information, BIREME not only contributes to informed decision-making and improved quality of life, but also strengthens health systems and helps reduce health inequalities in Latin America and the Caribbean. By accelerating innovation in its health information products and services, BIREME reaffirms its role in building healthier and more resilient societies.

7. Acknowledgements and information on the development of this document

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8. Appendix 1: Executive Report 2023/2024 (Full Text)

9. Appendix 2: BIREME Strategy 2023-2025