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**THE ECONOMIC IMPACT OF NATURAL DISASTERS
ON HEALTH INFRASTRUCTURE**

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FOREWORD

The Meeting on Disaster Mitigation with respect to Health Facilities and the Formulation of Guidelines for the Latin American and Caribbean Region will take place from 26 to 29 of February 1996 in Mexico City, at the request of the Pan American Health Organization (PAHO) and as part of the International Decade for Natural Disaster Reduction. During the course of preparatory sessions for the mission, the Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean (ECLAC) was entrusted with the task of preparing a study on the economic impact of natural disasters on hospital facilities. Likewise, it was decided to revise the methodology used in assessing these effects on the health sector; it was decided to include an analysis of both direct and indirect economic consequences, together with a description of the reconstruction processes undertaken in a number of selected hospitals, which the measures for mitigating the damage of future natural disasters provided for.

During the past two decades, ECLAC has carried out a variety of studies on the economic effects of natural disasters in the region, including one entitled "*Manual para la Estimación de los Efectos Socioeconómicos de los Desastres Naturales*." These documents, together with others obtained from a very wide range sources, have been regarded as the basis for analysis and evaluation during the preparation of the present study. The emphasis is placed not only on damage assessment but also on the rehabilitation/reconstruction planning following disasters which is vital if this vulnerability is to be mitigated.

Firstly, an account is given of the damage incurred by hospitals and health infrastructure as a result of natural disasters in Latin America and the Caribbean over the past 15 years -a distinction being made between direct and indirect damage-, as well as replacement costs. This is followed by a brief summary of the hospital buildings affected by natural disasters; information is given as to the number of such buildings which were reinforced during their repair or, in those which were rebuilt, the building standards which were introduced in order to reduce the impact of such occurrences. The aim of this section is to identify the relative cost, and the nature, of these modifications.

In short, this study seeks to clarify to what extent the investment in mitigation measures for health infrastructure is justified, as well as the costs involved, this being the central focus of the above-mentioned meeting: assessing the costs and results of mitigation measures in relation to the damage that such measures are designed to avoid in the event of a natural disaster. The Pan American Sanitary Bureau and the Joint PAHO/WHO Disaster Documentation Centre in San José, Costa Rica, collaborated in the carrying out of this study.