Policy-makers in countries worldwide are continually reviewing avenues to guarantee universal health coverage to all their citizens that is financially feasible and sustainable. Reviews have been conducted on the method of fund collection, how funds are pooled to spread risks, which services are provided free and which are purchased, and how doctors, nurses, and other staff are paid. Focus has also been directed at ways to cope with soaring health care costs, changing disease patterns, and the rising expectations and demands of their populations.

The Bahamas is also committed to Universal Health Coverage (UHC), which is defined by the World Health Organization, as “ensuring that all people can access the promotive, preventive, curative and rehabilitative health services they need, of sufficient quality to be effective, while also ensuring that the use of these services does not expose the user to financial hardship”.

The Bahamian Government has proposed the implementation of a National Health Insurance as the means for achieving UHC and in preparation for this, various technical and financial options need to be studied in order to make it feasible and sustainable, especially when the world, and the country, is still struggling with the impact of the global economic downturn.

In the above photograph: Dr. Gerry Eijkemans, PWR; Dr. Victor Zamora, HSS Advisor; Dr. Cristian Morales and Mrs. Claudia Pescetto, Senior Advisors-PAHO's Regional Office, meet with the Honourable Michael Halkitis, Minister of State, and officials of the Ministry of Finance

In order to start the process of developing financial and policy options, the Minister of Health of The Bahamas, Honourable Dr. M. Perry Gomez, requested technical assistance of PAHO/WHO. In response to this request, Dr. Cristian Morales and Mrs. Claudia Pescetto, Senior Health Financing Advisors from PAHO Headquarters in Washington, DC, USA, visited The Bahamas during the period, 5th through 8th March, 2013. The overall objective of their visit was to conduct a rapid assessment of the economic, institutional and political environment for implementing the National Health Insurance (NHI) initiative and to work with PAHO Country Office (CO) and the Ministry of Health on defining the next steps in relation to PAHO technical assistance for its implementation.

Both experts, together with Dr. Gerry Eijkemans, PWR and Dr. Victor Zamora, HSS Advisor, had the opportunity to meet with the Minister of Health, the Minister of State for Finance and high level officials from both ministries, as well as the Central Bank of the Bahamas, the National Insurance Board, the National Prescription Drug Plan, the Public Hospitals Authority, and the Department of Statistics.

The PWR and Dr. Morales meet the Honourable Minister of Health of The Bahamas, Dr. M. Perry Gomez.