



RELATIONSHIP WITH NATIONAL AND INTERNATIONAL INFORMATION SYSTEMS

1. In a number of countries, the development of a NHIS has taken place as a part of a broader effort to develop an overall national information system that would cater to national needs in various fields such as science and technology, engineering, industrial technology and agriculture, in addition to those in the field of health. While the emphasis on NHIS development may thus be somewhat diluted, health information specialists in such countries do have the advantage of being made aware of the totality of information system development work at the national level and of the international links that exist or are planned and can more easily take advantage of shared experience, facilities and political support. By contrast, in countries where a NHIS exists as an entity more or less unto itself, such cross-fertilization with national information system work in other fields is less likely to take place and NHIS personnel not only risk duplicating work done and making mistakes committed elsewhere, but they almost inevitably will design a system whose inputs and outputs are incompatible with the main stream of information system development.

2. In recognition of this problem, UNESCO, through its UNISIST programme, has been working for some years to assist countries in the development of information policies. Although its initial emphasis was primarily on bibliographic systems, UNISIST has since broadened the scope of its activities to include the following objectives of particular relevance to NHIS's:

(a) making the products of different information systems exchangeable through developing common standards, rules and procedures;

(b) with the longer-run goal of full compatibility between all information systems, working towards means of providing interconnexions between systems that are not directly compatible;

(c) strengthening the functions and improving the performance of institutional components of the information transfer chain, such as libraries, documentation centres, indexing and abstracting centres, information analysis centres, etc.;

(d) developing national and international assistance programmes for training and education in the field of scientific and technical information.

3. UNISIST bears on the work of developing national health information systems in at least three ways.

First, there is the network of national focal points and UNISIST national committees in the 59 countries where one or both exist. The national focal points are governmental or government-chartered agencies charged with the responsibilities of guiding, stimulating and coordinating the development of information resources and services from the national, regional and international standpoints. In most instances, these national focal points have recourse to UNISIST national committees, composed of high-level members, that provide advice on the work of the focal points and assist them in coordinating UNISIST activities. A list of national focal points and UNISIST national committees is attached.

Close coordination between the national health information system and its UNISIST counterparts at the national level should enable each to benefit from the experience of the other, meanwhile enabling systems planners at the national level to draw upon this reservoir of national expertise and integrate their efforts into the overall matrix of information systems and services at the national, regional and global levels.

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Second, through its extensive programme of national and regional training courses and seminars for information personnel, UNISIST seeks to upgrade the effectiveness of existing systems and services; participation by national health information system personnel would be one useful way of providing needed training.

Finally, by bringing together national experts on scientific and technological information transfer to study both broad policy questions and various shared problems of a more specific nature, it permits effective diffusion of successful ideas and experience that are embodied in the various documents issued by UNESCO on behalf of UNISIST. The following five have particular relevance to national health information systems, and are recommended reading for anyone engaged in developing a NHIS:

- (a) UNESCO's Handbook for information systems and services provides "in a simple and concise fashion the concepts and prevailing practices concerning the planning and functioning of information systems and services, the need to consider information work in the context of the information flow from generators to users, and the need to promote national, regional and international collaboration and interconnexion of information systems and services". In its preface, the Handbook states that: "It should be useful for the emerging managers of information systems and services who will be faced with financial, administrative and organizational decisions. It should also be helpful in obtaining an overview of the field, including questions of information policy and planning, management and organization of information systems and services, procedures and methods, standardization, facilities and equipment, and training aspects";
- (b) Guidelines for the evaluation of information systems and services (UNESCO document PCI/78/WS/18);
- (c) Information policy objectives (UNISIST proposals) (UNESCO document SC/74/WS/3);
- (d) Information policy for development: national and international responsibilities (UNESCO document SC/76/Conf.960/Col.8);
- (e) Management of information resources at the national level (UNESCO document PCI/77/Conf.605/Col.5).

LIST OF NATIONAL FOCAL POINTS
AND
UNISIST NATIONAL COMMITTEES

Country	Focal point	National committee	Country	Focal point	National committee
Australia	X	X	Korea	X	X
Austria	X	X	Malta	X	X
Bangladesh	X	X	Mexico	X	
Barbados	X		Morocco	X	X
Belgium	X	X	Nepal		X
Bolivia	X	X	Netherlands	X	X
Brazil	X	X	New Zealand		X
Bulgaria	X	X	Nigeria	X	X
Canada	X	X	Norway	X	X
China	X		Pakistan	X	X
Costa Rica	X	X	Peru		X
Czechoslovakia	X	X	Philippines	X	
Denmark	X		Poland	X	X
Egypt		X	Portugal	X	X
Finland	X	X	Qatar	X	X
France	X	X	Romania	X	
Federal Republic of Germany	X	X	Senegal	X	X
German Democratic Republic	X	X	Spain		X
Ghana		X	Sri Lanka	X	X
Greece	X	X	Sweden	X	X
Hungary	X	X	Switzerland	X	X
India	X	X	Tunisia	X	X
Indonesia	X	X	USSR	X	X
Iran	X	X	United Arab Emirates	X	X
Iraq	X	X	United Kingdom	X	X
Ireland	X	X	United States of America	X	X
Israel	X	X	Uruguay	X	
Italy	X	X	Venezuela	X	
Ivory Coast		X	Yugoslavia		X

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