



Keynote Address of Dr. the Hon. Christopher Tufton, CD, MP
Minister of Health & Wellness
National Health Research Conference Opening Ceremony,
Jamaica Pegasus Hotel
Wednesday, February 04, 2026 | 09:00 A.M.

- Master of Ceremonies, Mr. Theodore Henry
- Mr. Ian Stein, PAHO/WHO Representative, Jamaica, Bermuda and Cayman Islands
- Dr. Lisa Indar, Executive Director, CARPHA
- Dr. Nicole Dawkins-Wright, Director, Emergency, Disaster Management and Special Services, MOHW
- Dr. Andriene Grant, Director, Epidemiological Research & Data Analytics, MOHW
- Dr. Carol Lord, Programme Development Officer & Public Health Specialist, Family Health Unit, MOHW
- Presenters
- Directors of the Ministry of Health & Wellness
- Specially invited guests,
- Ladies and gentlemen,
- Members of the Media

Good morning.



Ladies and gentlemen, it is my pleasure to welcome you to the 16th Annual National Health Research Conference, convened under the suitable and thought-provoking theme: “Health for All in a Changing Environment.” This conference remains one of the Ministry of Health & Wellness’ most important platforms for dialogue, discovery, and evidence-based action.

Let me begin by acknowledging that this event was originally scheduled for November of last year, but had to be postponed due to the impact of Hurricane Melissa. Like many aspects of national life, our health system and our research agenda were affected. However, the fact that we are gathered here today - stronger, prepared, and resolute, speaks to our collective resilience and our commitment to advancing health through knowledge.

I wish to extend sincere commendations to the National Epidemiology Branch for their tireless efforts in bringing this conference to fruition today. Despite the challenges, the team remained focused on ensuring that this important forum could still take place, and for that, we are deeply grateful.

Importance of Health Research

Health research is not a luxury, it is a necessity. It is the backbone of modern medicine and the foundation of effective healthcare delivery. Research allows us to understand disease patterns, evaluate interventions, improve patient outcomes, and design policies that respond to real-world challenges. From vaccines and diagnostics to treatment protocols and health systems planning, research has consistently transformed how we prevent illness, manage disease, and extend life.



Health Research in Jamaica

In Jamaica, health research plays a critical role in shaping public health responses, improving service delivery, and strengthening our ability to respond to emerging threats. In a changing environment marked by climate change, demographic shifts, technological advancement, and evolving disease burdens, research becomes even more essential. It ensures that our policies remain relevant, our systems resilient, and our care equitable.

Research Topics

This year's conference reflects that reality. The abstracts being presented over the course of this event span a wide and critical range of priority areas, each central to improving healthcare delivery and achieving health for all.

We will hear research on **Non-Communicable Diseases**, which continue to account for the majority of morbidity and mortality in our population and demand innovative prevention and management strategies.

The researchers will examine **Demographic Changes**, including ageing populations and declining birth rates, which are reshaping healthcare demand and requiring new models of care and social support. The focus on **Men's Health** is particularly important, as we continue to confront disparities in health-seeking behaviour, outcomes, and life expectancy among Jamaican men. Research in **Sexual and Reproductive Health** remains vital to safeguarding the well-being of women, adolescents, and families, and to ensuring informed choice and equitable access to services.

Additionally, **AI and Robotics in Healthcare**, an area that represents one of the most significant opportunities and responsibilities facing modern health systems.



And finally, **Workplace Wellness**, a topic that reminds us that healthy systems depend on healthy workers, and that protecting the well-being of our healthcare workforce is essential to sustaining quality care.

Each of these areas is interconnected. Together, they reflect a comprehensive approach to health - one that considers individuals, communities, systems, and the environments in which we live and work.

AI in Healthcare from Sectoral Presentation

Many of you will recall that at last year's sectoral presentation, I shared a forward-looking concept on the role of Artificial Intelligence in healthcare. At that time, we spoke not about technology for its own sake, but about AI as a tool to strengthen equity, efficiency, and outcomes across the health system. That vision was built on five strategic pillars:

- **AI Governance and Policy Framework** – ensuring ethical use, accountability, and alignment with national health priorities;
- **AI Infrastructure and Data Ecosystem** – strengthening digital foundations, interoperability, and data quality;
- **AI Solutions for Healthcare Priorities** – applying AI to areas such as diagnostics, disease surveillance, patient flow, and resource management;
- **AI Capacity Building and Workforce Development** – preparing our healthcare professionals to work confidently and competently with emerging technologies; and



- **Monitoring, Evaluation, and Continuous Improvement** – ensuring that AI solutions deliver measurable value and are continuously refined.

Cabinet’s Approval of AI in Healthcare

Today, I am pleased to announce that Cabinet has approved the proposal for AI in healthcare. This is a significant milestone for Jamaica’s health system. It signals our commitment to innovation that is guided by policy, grounded in evidence, and centred on patient care.

This approval also underscores the importance of forums such as this conference. Research, dialogue, and collaboration are what transform ideas into policy, and policy into action.

As we engage over the next few days, I encourage all participants to think not only about findings, but about application. How can this research inform practice? How can it shape planning? How can it improve the lived experience of patients and healthcare workers alike?

The Ministry of Health & Wellness remains committed to supporting research that drives transformation, strengthens resilience, and ensures that no one is left behind.

In closing, let me once again commend the National Epidemiology Branch, the organisers, reviewers, presenters, and stakeholders who have made this conference possible.



It is therefore my honour to declare the 16th Annual National Health Research Conference officially open. I wish you a productive, engaging, and impactful conference.

Thank you, and may our collective efforts continue to advance Health for All in a Changing Environment.