

Jordan Evans
Waverly High School
Lansing, Michigan, USA
Jamaica, Education

Education and Healthcare Issues in Jamaica: A Hopeful Solution

Imagine Jamaica: beautiful, white sand beaches, waves crashing against the shore, and a tropical aroma. The ultimate tourist destination. But what is life like for the people who live in what we call paradise?

Jamaica is home to about 2,820,982 people, and only 57% live in urban areas (CIA, 2023). The average household size in Jamaica is three people, but this number varies (The Caribbean Geo Portal, 2022). Monthly pay in Jamaica can range from \$442.04 to \$1,519.79 in U.S. dollars (Paylab, 2024). Groceries can cost about \$324.32 per person (Numbeo, n.d.). For lower-end salaries, the price of groceries doesn't leave much room for other household requirements. Families still need to pay rent or mortgage, electricity and water bills, and other expenses.

Education in Jamaica has its strengths and weaknesses. For ages six through twelve, education is free of charge. After those six years, the students must complete an exam to enter high school. High school, however, is not free. Families must pay for their children to complete secondary education. The average attendance rate for Jamaican students is only about 65%. That leads to a high percentage of illiteracy, more predominantly in boys. When exiting the school system, only about 20% of the graduates pursue higher education or gain substantial employment (CEF, n.d.).

Healthcare in Jamaica is accessible without cost, but the quality and quantity of healthcare facilities must be improved. Hospitals in Jamaica are assigned types: A, B, and C. The types have different levels of care, with type A being the most qualified in specialized care (Jamaica Informational Service, 2022). Jamaica is limited to only three type A and five type B hospitals (Jamaica Network, 2003)

Another reason for Jamaica's poor healthcare is its severe lack of doctors on the island. Per 10,000 people Jamaica only has 5.3 physicians; in comparison, per 10,000 people in America, there are 26.1 physicians (CIA, 2018). Why is there such a shortage of doctors in Jamaica? Brain drain is a massive issue on the island. Brain drain occurs when higher-educated citizens migrate from an area. Two causes of brain drain in the healthcare field in Jamaica, are poor working conditions and better jobs in richer countries (Canadian Journal of Public Health 103, 2012). The need for healthcare professionals and the poor quality of healthcare facilities contribute to Jamaica's insufficient healthcare.

How does education affect healthcare? Because of Jamaica's education system, fewer people pursue higher education. That means fewer people can fill more qualified positions, like doctors. Additionally, education affects the health of the individuals themselves. Jamaica struggles with non-communicable diseases, diseases that can't be spread through contact (PAHO, n.d.). There is a strong relationship between years of education and smoking, unhealthy diets, and lack of exercise. All of which can cause non-communicable diseases (Annual Reviews, 2018). Higher education leads to stable, paying jobs which families in Jamaica need to support themselves.

But what about Jamaica's economy? With all of those tourists, the economy should be rapidly growing. But that is not the case. Jamaica has one of the slowest-growing economies in the Caribbean (World Bank, 2023). Because Jamaica depends so heavily on tourism, the economy plummeted during the pandemic. Fifty-five percent of Jamaican households disclosed having experienced moderate to severe hunger during the pandemic (Research Open, 2022). Jamaica needs a more resilient, diverse economy.

Jamaica needs realistic but effective solutions to the education and healthcare problems. They need to work long-term and be cost-efficient. I propose two plans to address education and healthcare separately, but one way to fund them both.

The Pan American Health Organization (PAHO) is doing extraordinary things throughout the Americas to improve healthcare systems. Their project in Jamaica aims to build new healthcare centers, based mostly on primary care (PAHO, n.d.). PAHO has brought in healthcare professionals from other countries to help with the doctor shortage in Jamaica. Their goal is to make healthcare more efficient and accessible to the public. This is an amazing start, but everything can always be improved.

Building new healthcare centers will help rural areas that don't have an immediate doctor's office or hospital. However, there are existing facilities that need to be updated. The existing facilities need updated technology and more doctors to support the community. There should be programs to educate the community about non-communicable diseases, and how to protect yourself from them. Bringing in healthcare professionals from other countries to help is a good plan, but it doesn't work long-term. Updating healthcare facilities and improving the working conditions will decrease brain drain and more healthcare-trained Jamaicans will stay in Jamaica. More resources must be focused on educating the Jamaicans who want to go into healthcare and helping them along the way.

The reason why things like this haven't been implemented is money. How will all of this be funded? Jamaica is a big part of the tourism industry, so the government should take control of that. Currently, no laws are separating foreign companies from local companies (U.S. Department of State, 2024). The government in Jamaica should impose a tax on foreign tourism companies. The tax should vary depending on how much land the company owns, how many people stay in the resort, and how much money the company makes. For cruise companies how long they dock and how many people exit the ship while docked, should determine the tax paid to the Jamaican government. These laws can ensure that all of the money made in Jamaican resorts doesn't leave Jamaica. They can limit how much resort owners can keep.

With money from the taxes on resort companies, the education system in Jamaica can be improved. More schools can be built and secondary schooling can be free of charge. Schools should also have free breakfast and lunch, and free transportation to and from school for those who need it. With more schools and free secondary education, the illiteracy rate will decrease and more students will graduate and have a better chance at pursuing higher education.

With the next generation having better access to education, they will have a better chance of gaining jobs with higher pay, which will help them provide for their families and decrease food insecurity throughout

Jamaica. By updating the healthcare system and educating the community on non-communicable diseases, brain drain will decrease and the health of individuals will improve.

Jamaica isn't just the ultimate tourist destination. The people who live there are struggling with a lack of education opportunities and little access to quality healthcare. Increased education leads to higher job opportunities and improves the quality of life and health of individuals. My proposal is a dream solution, but we don't live in a dream world. If everyone works together, food insecurity, lack of education, and inadequate healthcare can be eradicated; not just in Jamaica, but all over the world.

Works Cited

- Esri Demographics Team. "Average Household Size in Jamaica," The Caribbean Geo Portal, 2022, <https://www.caribbeangeoportal.com/maps/esri::average-household-size-in-jamaica/about>.
- Fletcher Peter, FRCSEd; Archibald McDonald, DM(Surg), FRCSEd; Trevor McCartney, DM(Surg), FRCSEd; Reginald Carpenter, MA, MB BChir, FRCS. "Surgery in Jamaica," Jamaica Network, 2003, <https://jamanetwork.com/journals/jamasurgery/fullarticle/395719#:~:text=There%20are%203%20type%20A,services%20for%20all%20medical%20specialties>.
- Lofters, Aisha K. "The "Brain Drain" of health care workers: causes, solutions and the example of Jamaica," Canadian Journal of Public Health 103, e376-e378, 2012, <https://link.springer.com/article/10.1007/BF03404445>.
- N.a. "Food Prices in Jamaica," Numbeo, n.d, https://www.numbeo.com/food-prices/country_result.jsp?country=Jamaica&displayCurrency=USD.
- N.a. "Healing Hands - GOJ Healthcare Options," Jamaica Information Service, 2022, <https://jis.gov.jm/information/get-the-facts/healing-hands-goj-healthcare-options/#:~:text=There%20are%20318%20clinics%20and,with%20minor%20emergencies%20and%20wounds>.
- N.a. "2024 Investment Climate Statements: Jamaica," U.S. Department of State, 2024, <https://www.state.gov/reports/2024-investment-climate-statements/jamaica/>.
- N.a. "Jamaica - The World Factbook," CIA World Factbook, 2024, <https://www.cia.gov/the-world-factbook/countries/jamaica/>.
- N.a. "Physician density - The World Factbook," CIA World Factbook, 2018, <https://www.cia.gov/the-world-factbook/field/physician-density/>.
- N.a. "Salaries in Jamaica," Paylab, 2024, https://www.paylab.com/jm/salaries-in-country?global_salary_period=monthly.
- N.a. "Strengthening Health Systems & Services in Jamaica," PAHO, n.d, <https://www.paho.org/en/stories/strengthening-health-systems-services-jamaica#:~:text=Health%20centres%20face%20multiple%20challenges,for%20those%20with%20chronic%20conditions>.
- N.d. "Jamaica Overview: Development News, Research, Data," World Bank, 2023, <https://www.worldbank.org/en/country/jamaica/overview#:~:text=As%20its%20neighbors%20across%20the,economy%20has%20begun%20to%20revive>.

N.d. "Jamaica Set to Record 4.1 Million Visitors and US\$4.3 Billion in Earnings for 2023," Ministry of Tourism, 2023,

<https://www.mot.gov.jm/news-releases/jamaica-set-record-41-million-visitors-and-us43-billion-earnings-2023#:~:text=In%20terms%20of%20tourism%20earnings,%20pandemic%20year%20of%202019.%E2%80%9D>.

Reid, Lisa, "Post COVID-19 Household Food Insecurity in Jamaica," Research Open World, 2022,

<https://researchopenworld.com/post-covid-19-household-food-insecurity-in-jamaica/#:~:text=In%202022%2C%20the%20World%20Food,severely%20food%20insecure%20%5B13%5D>.

Zajacova Anna, Elizabeth M. Lawrence. "The Relationship Between Education and Health: Reducing Disparities Through a Contextual Approach," Annual Reviews, 2018,

https://www.annualreviews.org/doi/full/10.1146/annurev-publhealth-031816-044628#_i2.