Overview

Health Policy Plus (HP+) is a seven-year (2015–2022) U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID)-funded project implemented by a consortium of partners, led by Palladium. HP+ strengthens policy design, implementation, and financing to improve the health and life prospects of people in more than a dozen countries worldwide. In Honduras, HP+ offers demand-based technical assistance and implementation to decrease morbidity, mortality, and forward transmission of COVID-19.

The emergence of the COVID-19 global pandemic poses new challenges to already strained health systems worldwide. Given the unprecedented nature of the virus, governments have been forced to create systems for prevention, containment, and mitigation without a complete understanding of viral transmission, epidemiology, or effective supportive care for COVID-19. In Honduras, the first reported death from COVID-19 occurred in early March 2020. Within a five-month period, the number of confirmed cases surged to over 60,000 and reported deaths reached nearly 2,000. HP+ is working closely with the government and other partners to ramp up prevention and mitigation measures to save lives and manage the surge of COVID-19 patients who are overwhelming Honduran health facilities.

Case Management

To effectively prevent mortality and mitigate long-term consequences for people who acquire COVID-19, the healthcare system must effectively manage increasing numbers of suspected or confirmed cases. To address the surge of mild, moderate, and severe COVID-19-diagnosed patients, the health system at all levels needs to ensure appropriate care pathways, protection of healthcare workers, and deter the spread of the virus within facilities through optimal infection prevention and control (IPC) practices. To this end, HP+ has delivered the following technical assistance to the Ministry of Health in a short 10-week period:

- Conducted a rapid assessment of 22 hospitals’ critical care capacity
- Analyzed hospital infrastructure to identify essential needs to accept and use mechanical ventilation equipment donated by the U.S. Government
- Assessed healthcare workers’ skills to use the donated mechanical ventilation equipment
- Developed a critical care training and mentorship program to strengthen required capacities among healthcare workers
- Facilitated trainings to over 400 frontline health personnel (doctors, intensivists, and nurses) on ventilator use and IPC processes from three hospitals serving two major cities in Honduras
- Distributed 210 ventilators to 22 critical care health facilities
- Established a local partner agreement with the Honduran Association of Intensive Care Specialists to deliver ongoing mentorship to healthcare workers

Our Work

HP+ works across three of USAID’s strategic pillars to improve COVID-19-related laboratory capacity, surveillance, and case management, with an emphasis on infection prevention and control across the three pillars. HP+ also supports USAID with epidemiological modeling exercises and scenarios to better assess the COVID-19 landscape at the national and subnational level in Honduras and inform evidence-based decision-making processes.
on the most up-to-date care processes and systems for COVID-19 patients

In this area, HP+ is also working to support the Ministry of Health to update evidence-based IPC and home-based care technical guidelines and develop accompanying easy-to-use, visual guides for distribution among healthcare workers and local communities. These will serve as essential references to prompt behavior change on topics such as hand hygiene, putting on and taking off personal protective equipment, home infection control, isolation, care plans, and timely referrals to prevent infection among healthcare workers, their patients, families, and the community at large. In addition, the project is assessing Honduras’ oxygen ecosystem to support the Ministry of Health’s ongoing needs to provide medical gases for critical care of COVID-19 patients.

Laboratory Capacity

Accurate and timely laboratory test results are the cornerstone of a functional and dependable laboratory system in a pandemic response. HP+ and its local partners are working to strengthen laboratory capacity throughout Honduras to improve the country’s ability to meet the testing demand and support connectivity amongst the other strategic pillars of technical assistance for the COVID-19 response.

HP+ supports four Ministry of Health laboratories performing SARS-CoV-2 testing by assessing and prioritizing existing strengths and needs. Based on current laboratory infrastructure, the project is supporting Honduras to reach its daily testing capacity (about 2,000 samples/day). A detailed HP+ analysis, which included crucial lab commodity projections, informed decisions for directed investments to enhance testing strategies, including procurement priorities—these targeted investments are expected to increase testing capacity by at least 1,000 samples/day by the end of the month.

The project is also working closely with the Ministry of Health’s surveillance unit to establish a laboratory information management system. The system includes modules for sample accession, location, processing status, lab testing results and data, and inventory of valuable supplies. The goal is to improve the flow of samples and data within and across the lab and streamline data entry, reduce errors, and provide a framework for problem-solving methods with the lab.

To develop capacities, HP+ is strengthening knowledge and skills among laboratory staff by providing training on a range of topics, including RT-PCR basics and high-level troubleshooting techniques of RT-PCR results. The project is developing a training manual of key protocols to support standardization of procedures within and across laboratories. To ensure sustainability, HP+ issued recommendations to the Ministry of Health to (1) appoint a laboratory supervisor to oversee lab safety, quality control, and adequate use of information technology systems, and (2) launch a government-led laboratory technical working group to endorse standardized protocols and best practices that will optimize the country’s ability to respond to the current pandemic and future public health crises.

Surveillance

Use of comprehensive and accurate data for decision making in a rapidly evolving pandemic is crucial to both guide effective resource allocation and save lives. HP+ provides technical assistance to the Surveillance Unit of the Honduran Ministry of Health to manage the flow of data from the point of data collection through dissemination. When issues are identified or a new type of data is incorporated into the surveillance system, HP+ takes a leading role in analyzing the impact to the data system. This may involve creating new or modifying existing processes, data collection tools, and information systems at the local, regional, and national levels. For example, HP+ is working with information technology experts to articulate the changes needed to the PAHOFLU application to support COVID-19 surveillance in Honduras. The project also plays a key part in capacitating regional staff in the adaptation of new tools and processes and monitors data quality at all levels. Finally, HP+ has a central role in the aggregation, analysis, and reporting of daily and weekly surveillance data, in addition to data on health services capacity.

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This publication was produced for review by the U.S. Agency for International Development. It was prepared by HP+. The information provided in this document is not official U.S. Government information and does not necessarily reflect the views or positions of the U.S. Agency for International Development or the U.S. Government.

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