

# Health Policy Plus: El Salvador

## Overview

Supporting the COVID-19 response in El Salvador, the Health Policy Plus (HP+) project, funded by the U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID), is helping the government enhance laboratory and surveillance capacity, strengthen rapid response teams, and improve patient outcomes while preventing transmission of COVID-19 among healthcare workers, other patients, and the community. In early 2020, HP+ quickly set up operations—where it had no pre-existing infrastructure, offices, or staff—to address urgent needs in a global crisis.

## Key Accomplishments

**Strengthened laboratory and surveillance capacity to maximize COVID-19 testing and sample management.** The HP+ approach engaged stakeholders early to identify needs and coordinate activities. The project trained laboratory personnel, healthcare workers, and epidemiologists on testing protocols, biosafety, and a barcode inventory management system, which was created by HP+ for the El Salvadoran government to improve the processing and management of COVID-19 laboratory samples and surveillance data. Additionally, healthcare workers in testing facilities and situation rooms participated in workshops to strengthen the quality of surveillance reports and improve data entry.

**Improved facility- and community-level care for COVID-19 patients, focused on saving lives and reducing the spread of infection.** HP+ supported the distribution of ventilators donated by the U.S.

## Preparing El Salvador for Successful COVID-19 Vaccination

From 2021–2022, HP+ and the EpiC project mounted a role-based training to equip all vaccination center staff in El Salvador with hands-on practice dealing with adverse vaccination events, infection prevention and control, hazardous waste management, injection safety, and data collection, among other skills. The training was conducted with regional health department directors, the National Biological Center, and the National COVID Operations Center at Hospital El Salvador, reaching 771 health workers representing all 17 vaccination centers of the Central Health Region. The training's success led to requests from the Ministry of Education to train headquarters personnel from that ministry and a request from the Council of Ministers of Central America and the Dominican Republic for training in infection prevention and control.

Government and provided healthcare workers in 31 hospitals with technical assistance on installation and correct use. The project adapted international guidelines on infection prevention and control and home-based care to strengthen the capacity of healthcare workers at all levels. In partnership with El Salvador's Ministry of Health (MINSAL), HP+ disseminated the home-based care guide to healthcare workers at community health facilities, training 1,327 individuals—59 of whom were trained as mentors. The National Nursing

Association of El Salvador supported expanded implementation by training nurse facilitators in five regions. Additional capacity strengthening work included:

- In collaboration with USAID’s Meeting Targets and Maintaining Epidemic Control (EpiC) project, and sister programs in Latin America, HP+ developed a Spanish-language learning network for healthcare workers and their teams, with 2,822 attendees joining across 10 sessions.
- HP+ and MINSAL developed a curriculum and trained 112 staff on providing COVID-19 telehealth support. The trainings included proper referrals for care, help on home care for suspected and confirmed COVID-19 patients, and mental health support for COVID-19 patients.
- HP+ established communities of practice at the primary care level on COVID-19 management, engaging a total of 86 healthcare workers from 11 primary care facilities.

### **Supported development and implementation of evidence-based policies on COVID-19.**

HP+ has developed or adapted for El Salvador 13 policies, protocols, standards, and guidelines related to COVID-19. In El Salvador, HP+ supported the National Biologics Center and the Advisory Commission for Immunization Practices with the third revision of the national technical guidelines for vaccination against COVID-19,

including Pfizer and Moderna vaccines donated by the U.S. Government through the COVAX global mechanism.

HP+ supported MINSAL to validate the revised national guidelines for patients with COVID-19 to care for patients who need respiratory care and mechanical ventilation. HP+ also supported MINSAL to design and validate its proprietary national guidelines on safe vaccination that, once approved, will apply to COVID-19 and other vaccines that are part of the country’s national vaccination program.

## **The Way Forward**

Ongoing efforts to sustain the momentum around COVID-19 policies and practices in El Salvador should include:

- Continuation of the established coordination mechanisms to convene critical bilateral and multilateral agencies and sectors to inform the response to future health threats.
- Continued uptake of the capacity strengthening mechanisms established, such as learning networks and virtual collaboration platforms, plus continued use of a training module for healthcare workers on how to conduct telehealth consultations for suspected and confirmed cases of COVID-19.
- Creation of a transitional monitoring system that can build on lessons learned from the pandemic to prepare for and respond to health and climate threats, including future epidemics.

## **CONTACT US**

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