

Strengthening local capacity for high-quality clinical management of COVID-19 cases in Paraguay

Between June 2020 and November 2021, EpiC provided technical assistance (TA) and capacity-strengthening support to ensure that health providers and facilities could use United States Government (USG)-donated ventilators safely and effectively. The USG, through the United States Agency for International Development (USAID), donated to the Government of Paraguay 280 ventilators for intensive care units to assist its fight against COVID-19. The donation delivered on the U.S. administration's pledge to provide these critically needed supplies and support Paraguay's ongoing efforts to mitigate the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic in the country.

The Meeting Targets and Maintaining Epidemic Control (EpiC) project collaborated closely with the Paraguayan Ministry of Health (MOH) to strengthen the capacity of the government to receive, install, and use the ventilators. EpiC led an assessment of TA needs for the clinical management of COVID-19, followed by the provision of clinical TA. Ventilators and TA were provided to 75 hospitals selected by the MOH based on their capacity to provide care for COVID-19 patients.

EPIC'S KEY ACCOMPLISHMENTS

- Installed 280 mechanical ventilators across all 18 sanitary regions of the country
- Conducted 75 facility-level assessments to determine hospital capacity to use the ventilators and identify TA needs
- Trained more than 545 health workers in COVID-19 clinical case management through virtual sessions
- A total of 215 nurses and doctors completed the online course "Fundamentals of Critical Care" developed by the Society of Critical Care Medicine (SCCM)

Activities and Accomplishments

COORDINATION WITH STAKEHOLDERS

EpiC held periodic virtual and in-person meetings with the MOH Services Division, the Intensive Care Unit Coordination Department, the Paraguayan Society for Intensive Care, and the USAID Mission in Asunción to identify TA needs and monitor progress to ensure those needs were met at the facility level.

FACILITY-LEVEL ASSESSMENTS

EpiC used the facility level assessment (FLA) tool to evaluate 75 hospitals and determine each hospital's capacity to use the donated ventilators and manage critical COVID-19 patients. Facilities were visited and FLA data were collected between August and October 2020 by a team of local medical experts whose findings and recommendations were presented to the MOH and USAID and informed the development of a workplan. TA activities included virtual clinical training for nurses and doctors, non-clinical TA for technicians on how to operate the donated ventilators, as well as TA to update Paraguay's COVID-19 management protocol.



Photo credit: EpiC Paraguay

Paraguayan President Mario Abdo Benitez and Minister of Health Julio Mazzoleni oversee the delivery of 200 ventilators from USAID.

TRAINING ON COVID-19 CLINICAL MANAGEMENT

Despite the constraints of the COVID-19 pandemic, all the training support provided to the MOH was completed through virtual learning technology. Twelve webinars were conducted with more than 545 participants from all regions of the country. Webinars were led jointly by EpiC consultants from Johns Hopkins University and selected Paraguayan experts. The webinars covered topics including evidence-based clinical management of COVID-19 (including novel therapeutics), effective use of medical oxygen therapy, ventilator management for critical COVID-19, and infection prevention and control.

The Society of Critical Care Medicine (SCCM) online course "Fundamentals of Critical Care," which was translated to Spanish for the first time, was provided to nurses and doctors. The course included virtual modules covering technical content and practical sessions. The Paraguayan Critical Care Society and SCCM experts jointly led the course, and 215 participants completed the training by October 30, 2021.

NON-CLINICAL TRAINING ON VENTILATOR USE AND MAINTENANCE

In coordination with the MOH's biomedical division, TA was provided by Medtronic to more than 40 technicians located across all 18 sanitary regions of the country. Additionally, EpiC collaborated with USAID's Procurement and Supply Management (PSM) project to ensure that

Medtronic provided preventive maintenance services to the MOH in 2021. A second round of maintenance services will be provided in 2022 at no cost to the MOH.

UPDATING THE NATIONAL COVID-19 PROTOCOL

During the last months of 2021, EpiC assisted the Paraguayan MOH with the revision and update of the national COVID-19 management protocol. EpiC reviewed and provided feedback on the protocol based on the latest evidence-based recommendations for the management of critical COVID-19 cases. EpiC also provided support by printing and distributing the protocol to 12 of the country's 18 sanitary regions.

Conclusions

EpiC's TA was well received by host country counterparts. Virtual training allowed the MOH to reach many health workers with key content for appropriate use of the donated ventilators and optimal management of mild, moderate, and severe COVID-19 cases. The inclusion of local experts during training sessions was instrumental to ensure that up-to-date content was adapted to the country's context. Some of the TA activities were highlighted on the social media accounts of the [MOH](#) and the [U.S. Embassy](#).

Meeting Targets and Maintaining Epidemic Control (EpiC), a five-year global project funded by the United States Agency for International Development (USAID), is dedicated to achieving and maintaining HIV epidemic control and supporting global COVID-19 response. EpiC is led by FHI 360 with core partners Right to Care (RTC), Palladium, and Population Services International (PSI). EpiC and its consortium members are implementing COVID-19 activities in more than 20 countries on three continents. In 13 of those countries, EpiC is providing technical assistance (TA) to governments and specific health facilities that received U.S. Government (USG)-donated ventilators and to health providers on COVID-19 clinical case management.

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