

USAID'S BUREAU FOR HUMANITARIAN ASSISTANCE (USAID/BHA)

REGIONAL OFFICE FOR LATIN AMERICA AND THE CARIBBEAN, SAN JOSÉ, COSTA RICA

USAID/BHA Supports Urgent COVID-19 Response Needs in LAC

Since the coronavirus disease (COVID-19) pandemic began impacting Latin America and the Caribbean (LAC), the USAID/BHA team of regional humanitarian experts has worked closely with national and local governments to identify the most critical needs and provide assistance to bolster response efforts.

In Ecuador's severely affected Guayas Province, USAID/BHA responded to a request for technical assistance from Mayor of Guayaquil city Cynthia Viteri. On April 15, through the Regional Disaster Assistance Program (RDAP), USAID/BHA activated a seven-person team of experts—comprising an Ecuador-based disaster risk management specialist (DRMS) and six surge capacity consultants—in Guayaquil to support local authorities with COVID-19 crisis response. The team assisted with information management, incident command system (ICS), psychosocial support, and biosecurity and helped create a crisis room at the Guayaquil's Directorate of Risk Management.

The RDAP program has more than 400 on-call local surge capacity consultants based in 27 LAC countries who can be quickly activated to expand USAID/BHA's regional core team capabilities. RDAP surge capacity consultants are highly qualified professionals with expertise in diverse areas and familiarity with local languages and customs. They can be activated as required to liaise with the host government's response authorities, assist with local response efforts, or conduct damage and needs assessments.

In Colombia, beginning in mid-April, USAID/BHA activated a DRMS and six surge capacity consultants to support local response authorities in Nariño Department, the municipality of Tunja in Boyacá Department, the municipality of Soacha in Cundinamarca Department, the Metropolitan Area of the Aburrá Valley in Antioquia Department, and the Archipelago of San Andres, Providencia, and Santa Catalina. The team helped local governments develop epidemiological projections, analyze information to



USAID/BHA provided hygiene kits to vulnerable households in the municipalities of Herrera, Los Santos, and Tablas in Panama. Photo by Manuel Santana, USAID/BHA

facilitate response decisions, create daily infographics, and conduct a psychosocial care program for the emergency operations center (EOC) and risk management offices' personnel. USAID/BHA also provided technical assistance for the development of a corpse management protocol and helped develop a mental health guide with recommendations on how to support and promote a state of physical and emotional well-being during the pandemic.

“During a response to a crisis of this magnitude, it is crucial to provide psychological support to strategic and operational response staff, which usually face a level of stress beyond what the general population may experience. For this reason, the USAID/BHA team in Colombia has prioritized the provision of emotional support to help first responders stay mentally and physically healthy, helping them to keep working efficiently and avoid post-traumatic stress disorders,” said Colombia-based DRMS Wilfredo Ospina, who is leading the USAID/BHA team in Colombia.

USAID/BHA also activated a surge capacity consultant to provide information management support to Costa Rica's National Commission for Risk Prevention and Disaster Response (CNE), which is leading the COVID-19 response in the country along with the Government of Costa Rica Ministry of Health. The USAID/BHA surge consultant helped CNE document the work done at the EOC's thematic working tables for future analysis and improvement of the response structure.

Through RDAP, USAID/BHA is also supporting COVID-19 response activities in other LAC countries by providing funds to support the local procurement of emergency supplies, disinfectant material, hygiene and cleaning kits, personal protective equipment (PPE), and fuel for first

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USAID/BHA provided funds to the Provincial Committee of Barahona in the Dominican Republic for the purchase of PPE and sanitizing gel. Photo courtesy of Zaira Pujols, USAID/BHA

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response vehicles. In addition, USAID/BHA is supporting the design of medical supplies and the provision of raw material for domestic face mask production.

In Honduras, USAID/BHA provided funds to the Cardiopulmonary Specialty Hospital “El Torax” for the local purchase of disposable medical gowns and boots and to La Ceiba Municipality and the National Institute for Juvenile Offenders (INAMI) for the procurement of sanitation products.

In the Dominican Republic, USAID/BHA funded the National EOC to buy motor pumps used for disinfection activities and fuel tickets for EOC vehicles used to mobilize response staff, and provided funds to the Azua Province Emergency Committee for disinfection materials and fuel.

In Colombia, between June and August, RDAP provided transportation and logistics support for the distribution of emergency commodities to vulnerable households in 21 communities throughout the country.

“On behalf of the Government of Colombia, I want to express our deepest gratitude to USAID/BHA for helping mobilize emergency supplies donated by national and international organizations to support COVID-19 response activities in the most vulnerable communities throughout the country,” said Colombia’s National Disaster Risk Management Unit Director Eduardo José Gonzalez. “I want to thank the USAID/BHA team in Colombia for always supporting us during emergency situations, thus contributing to creating more resilient communities and a better quality of life for all Colombians,” added Gonzalez.

USAID/BHA will continue to support national and local governments in LAC to address the most urgent needs of the COVID-19 pandemic response.



USAID/BHA supported the Metropolitan University of Honduras (UMH) on the design and printing of posters to promote hygiene measures and the proper use of PPE to prevent COVID-19. Photo courtesy of Carlos Velasquez, USAID/BHA

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In response to a request from the Government of Brazil, in September 2019, USAID deployed a team of six USFS experts to support efforts to assess causes of wildland fires in the Amazon Rainforest and recommend prevention measures. Photo by Forrest Behm, USFS

Strengthening Wildland Fire Management Capacities in Bolivia, Brazil, and Paraguay

In response to the unprecedented wildland fires that occurred in South America’s equatorial region in 2019, USAID/BHA, through the U.S. Forest Service (USFS), launched a technical assistance program to enhance efforts to prevent, mitigate, and respond to wildland fires in Bolivia, Brazil, and Paraguay.

In Bolivia and Paraguay, the program is supporting national and local emergency management agencies, fire brigades, and community first responders to improve wildland fire response operations and coordination. The USFS is working through a holistic approach that includes an initial assessment to determine priority areas for improvement followed by technical assistance to develop a standardized training program for wildland fire management. In addition, the USFS program will help strengthen emergency management operations and multi-agency coordination at both local and national levels through the implementation of operating procedures linked with regional standardization and inter-regional assistance initiatives.

and address the core causes of wildfires through investigation, fire prevention, and public outreach. The USFS will help adapt the U.S. fire investigation training and supporting materials to the Brazilian context to support the implementation of a standardized training approach across various agencies. This standardization will help multiple agencies coordinate more efficiently in collecting and communicating fire origin and causal information, reducing the impact of fires in Brazil.

Through this international collaboration, the USFS brings years of lessons learned, trying to reduce fire impacts in the U.S..



Between August and October 2019, USAID/BHA donated firefighting tools and PPE for nearly 2,000 Bolivian and Paraguayan responders, as well as 3,000 locally procured boots and other critical supplies. Photo by Irene Gago, USAID/BHA