

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

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



Medical staff examine a patient with respiratory symptoms at the Americares Family Clinic in El Salvador. *Photo courtesy of Americares*

Providing Critical Support to El Salvador's Health System During the Pandemic

With USAID/BHA support, Americares is helping El Salvador's health system expand its capacity to assist vulnerable communities in La Libertad and Usulután departments, as the country struggles to save lives and contain the spread of the coronavirus disease (COVID-19).

In coordination with the Government of El Salvador (GoES) Ministry of Health (MoH), Americares is increasing COVID-19 screenings, referrals for testing, and COVID-19 case management in El Salvador's eastern region. Americares is also conducting training on infection prevention and control for 10 public health facilities in the region. This support is based on a regional needs assessment conducted by Americares in collaboration with the MoH.

“Our expanded COVID-19 response not only focuses on early detection and isolation of suspected cases but also prioritizes outreach to patients with underlying health conditions

at increased risk for serious complications from COVID-19,” noted Americares Director for Latin America and the Caribbean Dr. Gabriela Salvador.

Americares has a thorough understanding of the Salvadoran health system, having supported medical activities in El Salvador since 1984. The non-governmental organization operates the largest outpatient health center in eastern El Salvador, “Clínica Integral de Atención Familiar,” located in Usulután, which provides nearly 80,000 medical consultations annually, as well as health education and prevention programs for thousands of low-income families.

However, since the GoES started implementing movement restrictions to contain the spread of COVID-19, many of the clinic's patients could not access the facility. To ensure the continuity of vital health services, Americares, through its USAID/

Continues on page 2

Enhancing Chile's Wildland Fire Management Capacities

In early September, USAID/BHA technical consultants held a virtual meeting with Chilean fire management authorities to present them with the Wildland Fire Management Course manual.

This event represented the culmination of a project that USAID/BHA began in January 2020 with the Chilean Wildland–Urban Interface Fire Management Task Force and the National Firefighters Academy (ANB) to compile and organize the Wildland Fire Management Course's contents and handbook.

The training comprises 11 online lessons aimed at strengthening firefighters' wildfire prevention and response competencies. Its purpose is to provide participants with the skills required to safely mitigate, detect, control, and extinguish wildland fires.

Continues on page 2



USAID/BHA integrated fire management specialists supported the development of the Wildland Fire Management Course and manual, which will help strengthen Chilean firefighters' capacities. *Photo courtesy of Chile's National Fire Corps*

Enhancing Chile's Fire Management Capacities, continued from page 1

Chile's National Fire Corps President Raúl Bustos said, "In the past, wildland fires were not subject to analysis by firefighters in Chile, but since 2017 it has been necessary to develop further research. For this reason, the Chilean National Operations System and the ANB surveyed experienced wildland fire management incident commanders throughout the country to collect information. We requested USAID/BHA's collaboration to help us give shape to that information, which today appears in the form of this course and manual."

"The 40-hour course is divided into three segments. The first section of the course provides training on wildland fire causes and behavior; the second section teaches the proper use of tools, machinery, and supplies to control fires; and the final section educates participants on fire safety and hazards," commented USAID/BHA Integrated Fire Management Specialist Luisa Alfaro.

Mariela Chavarriga, the USAID/BHA Disaster Risk Management Specialist for Chile, stated, "We are delighted to fulfill the task entrusted to us by local emergency response agencies. This material will greatly benefit Chile's firefighters and help protect the entire country."

Since 1998, USAID/BHA has provided specialized technical assistance in the Latin America and the Caribbean region to help countries increase their Integrated Fire Management capacities. USAID/BHA fire management programs aim to strengthen local agencies' responses to wildland fires, while helping protect the region's most vulnerable populations and biodiversity.



In early September, USAID/BHA consultants Luisa Alfaro and Mariela Chavarriga held a virtual meeting with Chilean authorities—including Chile's National Fire Corps President, Raúl Bustos, ANB Director Juan Carlos Field, Fire Protection Manager Aida Baldini, and National Operations Focal Point Alejandro Artigos—to present them with the Wildland Fire Management Course manual officially. *Photo courtesy of Chile's National Fire Corps*

Providing Support to El Salvador Health System, continued from page 1

BHA-funded program, hired and trained additional psychologists to provide virtual mental health consultations and community health workers to provide counseling and case management for patients with non-communicable diseases.

"With the suspension of public transportation, a lot of our patients cannot travel to the Américas health center in Usulután. Therefore, we provide them with virtual mental health consultations and medical counseling, and deliver them the medicine they require to treat their health issues," said Américas Director Salvador.

Américas Community Health Worker Xiomara Solano commented that patients are happy and thankful to hear her each time she calls, and they feel that the service is more personalized. Some of them thought that with the pandemic, they would no longer have access to health care information. A lot of her patients are older adults who feel very grateful to have someone monitoring their health and delivering them the medicine they cannot afford to purchase anymore. It motivates them to continue taking care of themselves.

Solano is part of the Américas' team of community health workers in eastern El Salvador, who provide essential health services in 12 low-income communities. During the pandemic, the team has continued to track patients' health through phone calls, videos, and text messages and ensure patients remember to take their medication and follow COVID-19 prevention measures. Community health workers are also facilitating the delivery of medicines to patients whose incomes have been significantly reduced during the pandemic.

In addition, to reduce the risk of COVID-19 spread, the Américas team delivers chlorine and soap along with health and COVID-19 prevention education to households and supports the installation of hands-free handwashing stations throughout communities.

Américas expanded health services and sanitation improvements are expected to benefit an estimated 200,000 Salvadorans in La Libertad and Usulután by the end of 2020 and help reduce the burden COVID-19 has placed on El Salvador's healthcare system.



Américas Community Health Worker Xiomara Solano (right) delivers diabetes treatment to a patient in El Salvador's Zapotillo Canton. *Photo courtesy of Américas*

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