

# Implementation of the EMT initiative in the Americas

**PAHO**



Pan American  
Health  
Organization



World Health  
Organization  
REGIONAL OFFICE FOR THE  
AMERICAS



AMERICAS REGIONAL GROUP

January 2020

With the financial support from the Spanish Agency for International Development Cooperation (AECID) and the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (HHS).

## FIRST STEPS

Among the world's regions, the Americas is the second-most affected by natural disasters. One quarter of these disasters have taken place in the Region of the Americas, and 77% of the Region's health facilities are located in disaster-prone areas.

The countries of the Region have steadily improved their response to medium-scale emergencies and disasters using their own resources. However, the potential for major events means it is necessary to have good coordination mechanisms to ensure a rapid response by national emergency medical teams. Furthermore, these teams may need assistance from international teams, following accepted standards and procedures and respecting the culture and customs of the countries of our Region.

To guarantee this response, in 2003 the Pan American Health Organization sponsored a workshop in El Salvador to examine the use of field hospitals during disasters, subsequently approving the "Guidelines for the Use of Foreign Field Hospitals in the Aftermath of Sudden-Impact Disasters," which spelled out the basic procedures that should be followed by personnel and teams, as well as the critical points to analyze before deploying a hospital.

The analysis in the 2010 report "Health Response to the Earthquake of Haiti" demonstrated the need for adopting principles, criteria, and standards for the response of medical teams in emergencies and disasters in line with global efforts to improve humanitarian standards and procedures.

Based on this analysis, in December 2010, the Pan American Health Organization brought a group of experts together in Cuba to review the 2003 guidelines and optimize the procedures for requesting, accepting, and coordinating international medical teams, with the object of improving response time and efficiency in their deployment. This working group served as the basis for the initiative currently known as emergency medical teams (EMT).

Today, the ministries of health in the majority of countries in the Region of the Americas have permanent emergency and disaster programs in place. This important operational and knowledge-sharing network will undoubtedly facilitate development of the EMT initiative and its effective implementation as part of national and international responses.

## MANDATE OF THE PAHO MEMBER STATES

In 1976, PAHO created the Emergency Preparedness and Disaster Relief Coordination Office, which has worked since then to strengthen country capacity to deal with all manner of emergencies and improve the coordination of international health assistance in our Region.

In 1986, following the major disasters of the previous year (earthquake in Mexico and eruption of the Nevado del Ruiz volcano in Colombia), representatives of governments and international organizations in the Region met in Costa Rica to draft a Pan American policy to make health assistance in disasters more efficient. This regional policy was endorsed in Resolution CD32.R10 of the 32nd Directing Council, which emphasized the need to consult affected countries before sending health assistance and to prioritize cooperation among neighboring countries in the event medical personnel are needed. That same resolution requested the timely and authorized distribution of information among countries and organizations to ensure that the appropriate type of response is provided.

During the 28th Pan American Sanitary Conference, held in September 2012, the Member States adopted Resolution CSP28.R19 “Coordination of International Humanitarian Assistance in Health in Case of Disasters,” which called on PASB to facilitate resource mobilization and the coordination of international health care to support affected countries, a flexible mechanism for the registry and accreditation of foreign rapid-response medical teams, and competency development for national teams.

Resolution CD52.R8 approved the Strategic Plan of the Pan American Health Organization 2014-2019 as the framework for strategic orientation and resource coordination and mobilization to reduce death and disease from emergencies and disasters.

The 53rd Directing Council of PAHO, comprised of delegates from the Member States, approved the “Plan of Action for the Coordination of Humanitarian Assistance” in the Americas, which calls for implementation of response procedures and flexible national mechanisms for the registration of emergency medical teams in the Member States. Furthermore, the 55th Directing Council approved the “Plan of Action for Disaster Risk Reduction 2016-2021,” which calls for strengthening the countries’ capacity to develop their own national teams and updating the knowledge and procedures of emergency and disaster response teams.

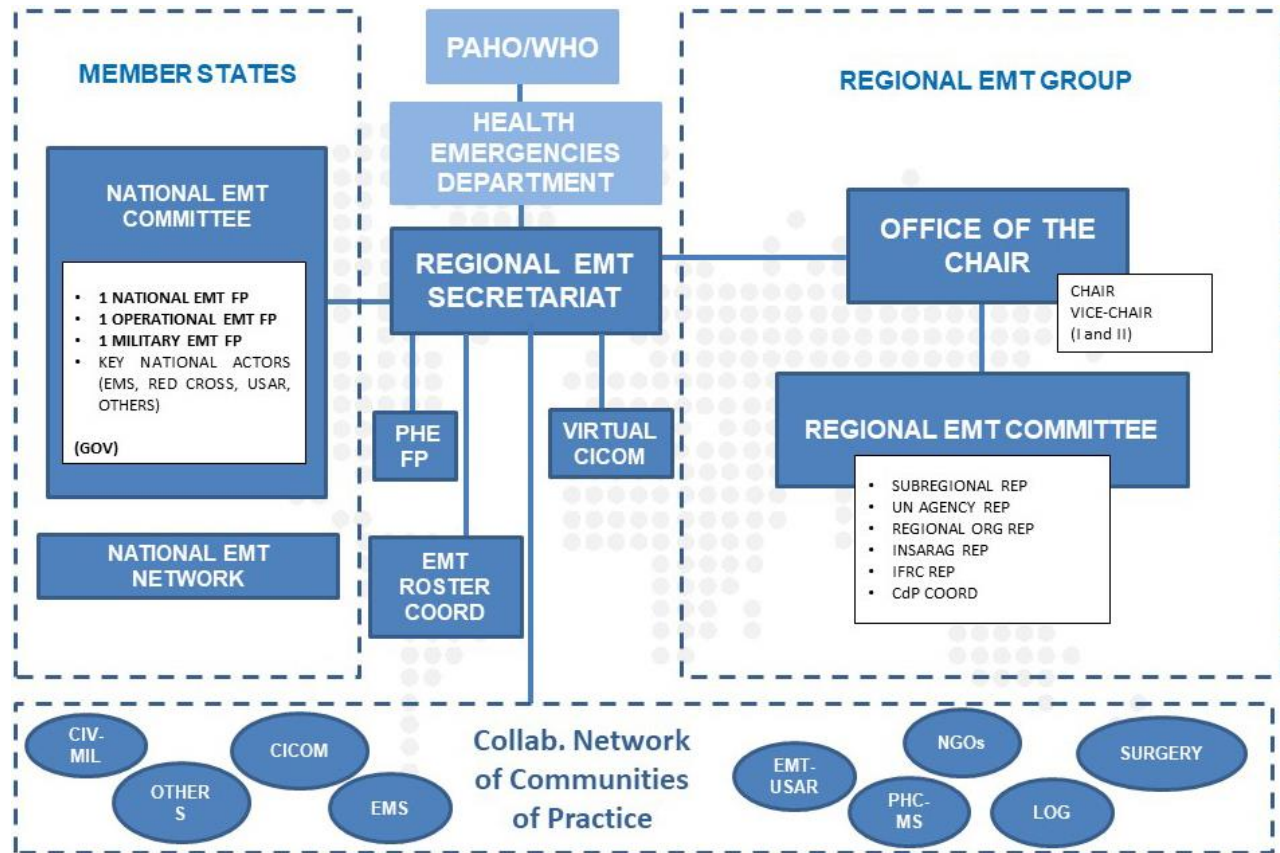
# ARCHITECTURE OF EMT IMPLEMENTATION IN THE AMERICAS

The global EMT initiative is implemented through the Global Secretariat and its six Regional Secretariats in Africa, the Americas, Southeast Asia, Europe, the Eastern Mediterranean, and the Western Pacific.

The Global Secretariat will hold meetings every two years, and the regional secretariats in intervening years.



The EMT initiative in the Americas will be implemented through the Pan American Health Organization and will be comprised of the Regional EMT Secretariat, the Regional EMT Group, and the national EMT focal point network.



The Regional EMT Secretariat is under the PAHO/WHO Department of Health Emergencies (PHE), which is mandated to provide technical assistance to strengthen the Member States' emergency health response capacity.

The Secretariat is also charged with managing and maintaining the regional roster of EMT coordinators, the Virtual EMT-CC/CICOM tool, and the collaborative network of EMT communities of practice. Its work is supported by the network of PHE focal points in each PAHO/WHO Representative Office.

The regional EMT group is the Secretariat's advisory body for the EMT initiative's implementation plan in the Region. It is headed by a Chair and at least one incoming Vice-Chair, appointed under a rotation system. It is made up of a regional EMT committee consisting of: a representative of the national focal points in each subregion, a representative of the United Nations system, a representative of the regional INSARAG group, and a representative of the International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies (IFRC), representatives of regional organizations, and the coordinators of each community of practice.

The Secretariat will also have the support of a network of national EMT focal points, appointed by the national authorities of each PAHO Member State to coordinate the creation and development of national EMT committees in each country.

## FUNCTIONS

### Regional EMT Secretariat

- Establish the strategy and plan of action for implementing the EMT initiative in the Region, in line with the current resolutions of the PAHO Directing Council.
- Provide technical assistance for national implementation of the EMT initiative and the creation of emergency medical teams.
- Gather and disseminate information about the EMT initiative to Member States and regional organizations.
- Maintain the regional roster of EMT coordinators and the Virtual EMT-CC/CICOM platform.
- Support the creation and development of the collaborative network of communities of practice, keeping the national EMT committees and the regional group apprised of the progress of its work.
- Hold workshops, events, and regional simulations as part of the EMT initiative.
- Organize the annual EMT meeting of the Region of the Americas jointly with the regional group.
- Maintain a schedule of meetings and regional events.
- Maintain an up-to-date roster of regional group members and EMT focal points.
- Maintain communication with the Global Secretariat and the other regions.

### EMT Coordinators

- At the request of the affected country, deploy in emergencies to assist with the coordination of emergency medical teams.
- Assist PAHO's EOC and the national EMT-CC/CICOM with information management and the coordination of EMTs
- Participate in missions to assess EMT capabilities in the countries of the Region
- Participate in the regional training activities of the EMT initiative
- Support national implementation of the EMT initiative in their respective countries
- Assist with the review of the documents prepared by the working groups

### Focal points of the PAHO Department of Health Emergencies (FP-PHE)

- Assist the Secretariat with its functions at the national level
- Increase contact with the national and operational EMT focal points of their respective countries.
- Help establish and develop national EMT committees in each country.

### Virtual EMT-CC/CICOM

- Manage online information on requests, offers, and the deployment of emergency medical teams in emergencies or disasters affecting the Region.

### Chair of the Regional EMT Group

- Promote the EMT initiative and standards in the countries and regional organizations of the American Hemisphere.
- Serve as the host and co-organizer (planning, logistical arrangements) and, if possible, cover the organizing costs of the regional EMT meeting together with the regional secretariat and the office of the Vice-Chair.
- Support and advise the Secretariat on regional implementation of the EMT initiative, in line with the current resolutions of the PAHO Directing Council.
- With the Secretariat, represent the regional EMT group at important meetings and events.

### Vice-Chairs of the Regional EMT Group

- Promote the EMT initiative and standards in the countries and regional organizations of the Americas.
- Assist the Chair and the regional secretariat with the co-organization of the regional EMT meeting.
- Support and advise the secretariat and the Chair on regional implementation of the EMT initiative, in line with the resolutions of the PAHO Directing Council currently in force.
- In coordination with the Chair, represent the regional EMT group and the Secretariat at important meetings and events.

### Regional EMT Committee

- Assist the Chair in developing the functions of the Regional EMT Group for the Americas.
- Support planning and development of the regional EMT meeting, as necessary.
- Suggest actions and activities for implementing the EMT initiative.
- Offer recommendations to the Office of the Chair and the Regional Secretariat for developing EMT standards.

### Collaborative Network of Communities of Practice

- Share and examine good practices, technical concepts, and operational issues in EMT development and response to improve the initiative at the regional level.
- Discuss and devise solutions for specific problems with EMT implementation in the Region of the Americas.
- Assist global working groups with the submission of regional proposals.
- Prepare and develop technical notes, training packages, and simulation exercises to strengthen regional EMTs.
- Participate and collaborate in events and activities of the EMT initiative.
- Keep the Regional EMT Secretariat apprised of the progress of its work.

### National EMT Committee

- Assist the national EMT point focal in the development of tools, regulations, and policies to carry out the EMT mission cycle.
- Suggest actions and activities for national implementation of the EMT initiative and strengthening of the national network.
- Help plan and hold national meetings.
- Promote national participation in the communities of practice.

### National EMT focal points

- Ensure efficient information sharing with relevant EMT actors at the national level.
- Ensure the development of tools, regulations, and policies for sending, receiving, and deploying EMTs in their country, in line with the guiding principles and basic standards of the global initiative and implementation in the Region.
- Promote the implementation of CICOM in health coordination mechanisms and the national EMT registry system.
- Coordinate the establishment and development of national EMT committees.
- Serve as the country's point of contact with the Secretariat for institutional issues related to implementation of the EMT initiative.
- Describe their country's capacity to send and receive EMTs.
- Ensure their country's representation at regional meetings on EMTs.



- Share the information provided by the Regional Secretariat on meetings, workshops, and simulations with the national level.

### National EMT operational focal points

- Assist the national focal point with operational issues connected with the EMT response.
- Ensure efficient information sharing and the updating of operating procedures with national EMTs.
- Help the national focal point develop the plan of action for CICOM implementation and the national EMT registry system.
- Promote the strengthening of national EMT capacities, in line with the basic requirements established in the global EMT initiative and implementation in the Region.
- Help the national focal point establish and develop the national EMT network.
- Serve as the country's main point of contact with the Secretariat for operational issues related to implementation of the EMT initiative.
- Update the map of available national EMTs in the country.

### National EMT network

- Discuss and share good practices and procedures in health care, as well as operational support for local EMT response.
- Help strengthen the capacities of other local EMTs in the national network.
- Collaborate with the operational focal point to update the mapping of leaders and capacities in national EMTs.
- Maintain an up-to-date account in the Virtual CICOM.
- Participate and collaborate in the national activities and exercises of the EMT strategy.

### Military EMT Focal Point (if applicable to the country)

- Promote awareness of the EMT strategy and the WHO global classification process in military health.
- Ensure efficient information-sharing with those responsible for military EMTs.
- Ensure the development of tools, regulations, and procedures for the deployment of military EMTs to emergencies and disasters, in coordination with the health authorities.
- Promote civilian-military cooperation mechanisms to facilitate rapid deployment of national and international EMTs and improve interoperability in clinical response activities.
- Participate and collaborate in national and regional activities and exercises within the EMT strategy.
- Act as the main point of contact between the country and the Secretariat with respect to the adoption of the EMT strategy in military EMT response.

## MEMBERSHIP

Membership in the regional EMT group and network of EMT focal points is open to all Member States in the Region and to organizations involved in the EMT response. Membership must be recommended and approved by the respective national health authorities or national emergency and disaster risk management units.

The regional group is headed by a Chair and a maximum of two Vice-Chairs, appointed in a rotation system. The first Vice-Chair presides over the group when the Chair's term ends. A second Vice-Chair succeeds the first Vice-Chair. The Chair serves for one year. The Secretariat will annually call on the Member States to fill the vacancies.

The designation of EMT focal points is at the discretion of the health and disaster management authorities, depending on the country's administrative structure. Health authorities in the Member States should inform the regional secretariat about the designation of their EMT focal points through the respective PAHO Representative Offices and update the information when focal points are replaced.

It is advisable for the national EMT focal point to be a health official with experience in international cooperation or an official of the organization charged with disaster management who can provide institutional support for the development and implementation of the EMT initiative in the country.

Operational focal points should be specialists in EMT technical management and leadership. It is recommended that they have training and experience in EMT response.

Depending on the conditions in each country, the health authorities can designate the same professional to act as the national EMT focal point and also to provide operational support. The composition of the national EMT committee will depend on the country's context and level of implementation of the EMT initiative.

In the countries that have a military focal point, it is recommended that this person be a member of the armed forces or a Ministry of Defense staff member who takes part in the response of military medical units and mobile hospitals.

Participation in the regional EMT committee will be by invitation from the Secretariat.

EMT leaders belonging to nongovernmental organizations in the Region are invited to join the community of practice for NGO response, and to take part in national processes in their respective countries.

## EMT COMMUNITIES OF PRACTICE

EMT communities of practice (CoPs) are formal, voluntary groups of professionals that share a concern or mutual interest in the implementation of the EMT initiative in the Region. They share knowledge to strengthen national implementation, logistics, and operational support so that emergency medical teams can achieve their capacity. This contributes to better-informed dialogue with decision-makers, often leading to better-coordinated EMTs and timely, quality clinical response in emergencies.

EMT-CoPs aim to:

- Promote knowledge-sharing and foster learning in their domain.
- Provide specific information to solve shared problems in the context of a community's specific knowledge base (coordination, clinical response, logistics, operations, and transborder cooperation).
- Keep information on lessons learned and best practices in coordination and clinical care in emergencies.

The components of a community of practice are:



- **Domain:** the specific area of interest that the community shares and that creates the common identity that guides activities and knowledge development.
- **Practice:** the set of knowledge, methods, stories, cases, tools, documents, etc., that constitute the main activities of the members.
- **Community:** the virtual or physical forum where EMT members share common interests, participate in activities and discussions, offer mutual assistance, and share information.

The Regional Secretariat will create and announce the different communities of practice in the collaborative network, based on emerging needs within the EMT community and in alignment with the global development of the EMT strategy. Participation will be voluntary, and participants will be nominated by their respective organizations, institutions, or countries.

Communities of practices will have the following levels of participation:

- Coordinator: ensures that the community focuses on its domain, maintains relations among members and with other communities in the collaborative network, and develops its practice.
- Main group: helps the coordinator maintain the community. Members identify subjects of interest for the community and participate actively in discussions, activities, and projects.
- Active members: members who attend meetings regularly and sometimes participate in activities.
- Observing members: members with more limited participation but interested in following the discussions and activities.
- External participants: non-members who have areas of common interest with the communities in the collaborative network and who share knowledge through the community portal or participate in discussions between communities.

The collaborative network of communities of practice will be developed through the [emtamericas.org](http://emtamericas.org) platform, where the EMT community can find the different CoP portals, as well as other resources to support the strengthening of EMT capacities.

## COUNTRIES' ROLE IN IMPLEMENTING THE EMT INITIATIVE

The countries of the Americas are expected to conduct the following activities for national implementation of the initiative:

- Participate actively in the EMT Regional Group of the Americas.
- Update their national standards and procedures for requesting, accepting, and receiving emergency medical teams.
- Promote the classification of national EMTs
- Develop a national mechanism for the registry of national and international emergency medical teams.
- Develop information management and EMT coordination tools based on the EMT-CC/CICOM model.
- Share experiences and good EMT practices with the rest of countries of the Region.