

## Overcoming barriers to COVID-19 vaccination: Colombia, Honduras, Brazil, El Salvador, and Guyana

During the second half of 2022, the Pan American Health Organization (PAHO) employed U.S. funding to support Latin American and Caribbean countries as they focused on expanding COVID-19 vaccination activities in remote communities where conflict, persistent vaccine hesitancy, and/or lack of access to health services leave them vulnerable to the SARS-CoV-2 virus.



*PAHO has supported Colombia's recent efforts to generate more demand for COVID-19 vaccination within the indigenous population in Tarapaca, Amazonas. Photo credit: PAHO 2022*

### Colombia

PAHO's support of Colombia's COVID-19 vaccination program has helped generate a 16.8% increase in the country's vaccination coverage rate this year. As part of Colombia's program, the Ministry of Health and Social Protection has focused on the northern Vichada Department, where immunization has been limited by geographic isolation and vaccine hesitancy among the region's largely indigenous communities.

With support from the U.S. Government (USG) financial contribution, PAHO helped the Ministry hire staff for Vichada's health secretariat, who are developing communications campaigns to fight

disinformation about COVID-19 vaccines and raise awareness of their importance. The program is employing an intercultural approach so indigenous people can make their own, informed decisions on vaccination.

In addition, PAHO is supporting COVID-19 interventions in municipalities prioritized due to armed conflict, higher poverty rates, illicit economies, and lack of strong institutions. The municipalities include Guapi in Cauca Department, and Mocoa and Puerto Guzmán in the Putumayo Department. In recent months, PAHO supported procurement of cold chain supplies – including 50 cold packs, four thermal boxes, four refrigerators, and two freezers – as well as three laptop computers, seven tablets, and two printers to improve vaccination record-keeping in the communities.



These targeted COVID-19 programs have contributed to Colombia's substantial increase in vaccination. By November 2022, 71.8% of the population had received at least two doses of COVID-19 vaccine, compared to 55% in January. As a result, Colombia has reached the 70% COVID-19 vaccination coverage rate that the World Health Organization (WHO) set as a target for all countries.

*Left: In Tarapaca, Amazonas, health workers learn how to use PAIWEB, an app employed by Colombia's Extended Program on Immunization to register vaccinations. Photo credit: PAHO 2022*



Nurses from the Tela Integrated Hospital in northern Honduras support COVID-19 vaccination in nearby communities.  
Photo credit: PAHO 2022

## Honduras

At the outpatient clinic of the Tela Integrated Hospital in northern Honduras, nurses travel to nearby communities, bringing COVID-19 vaccines door-to-door. Often, they encounter people who don't believe COVID-19 exists or have received disinformation such as the rumor about computer chips being injected with the vaccine. In one village, nurse Karen Canales said, "I found a family of five people and none of them had received a single dose of the vaccine. I spent about an hour talking to them, convincing them, and I managed to vaccinate them all."

The nurses' door-to-door campaign is one of many strategies that Honduras employs to overcome persistent vaccine hesitancy. PAHO has provided technical support to the Ministry of Health's national communications campaign with pro-vaccination messaging in Spanish and local languages distributed through radio, TV, print materials, and social media. In addition, PAHO supported the Ministry's health fairs in four municipalities – Santa Rosa de Copán, La Ceiba, the Central District, and San Pedro Sula. The fairs offer COVID-19 vaccines and routine vaccinations against tuberculosis, polio, rotavirus, and human papillomavirus. The fairs also provide an opportunity to disseminate pro-vaccination messaging.

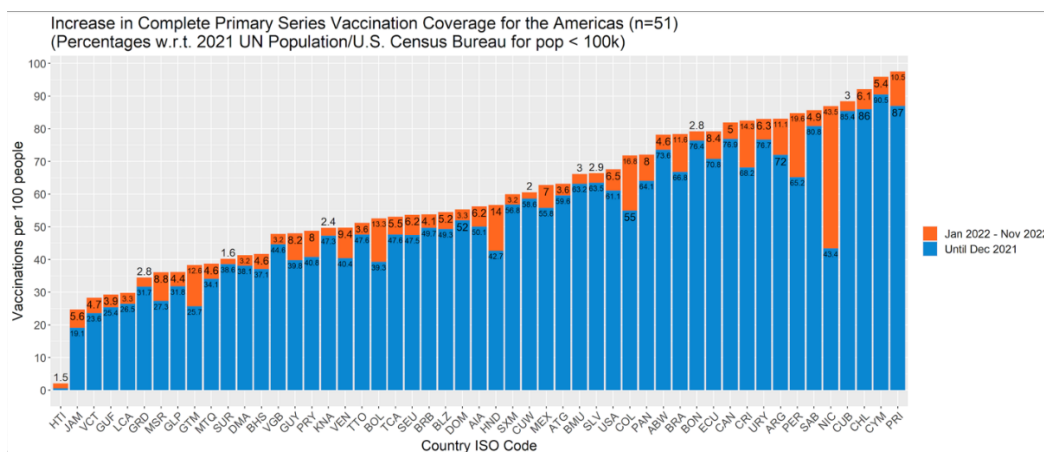




Health fair in San Pedro Sula, the capital of Honduras' Cortés Department, in October 2022. Photo credit: PAHO 2022

Honduras's Ministry of Health has deployed vaccination teams to regions prioritized because of their low vaccination rates, including the departments of Gracias a Dios, Colón, Copan, Santa Barbara, Yoro, Lempira, and Atlántida. In addition to vaccinations, the teams provide COVID-19 testing, mental health care, testing of blood glucose levels, and other health services.

This year, Honduras's COVID-19 program has generated a 14% increase in the country's vaccination coverage rate. By November 2022, 56.7% of the population had received at least two doses of COVID-19 vaccine, compared to 42.7% in January of the same year.





## Brazil

In recent months, Brazil's Ministry of Health has focused vaccination drives on vulnerable communities, including Estrutural, the Brasilia neighborhood where most people live in extreme poverty and do not have regular access to health care. With PAHO support, vaccination teams made nine trips into Estrutural in August 2022 alone to offer COVID-19 vaccination sessions. The teams promoted immunization through events such as a pro-vaccination graffiti workshop, in which children and adolescents from neighborhood public schools took part.

The Ministry's COVID-19 vaccination efforts have led to a 11.6% increase in the vaccination coverage rate in Brazil this year. By November 2022, 78.4% of the population had received at least two doses of COVID-19 vaccine compared to 66.8% in January.



*Pro-vaccination graffiti in Estrutural, Brasilia. Photo credit: PAHO 2022*

## El Salvador

El Salvador's Ministry of Public Health faces difficulty in reaching communities in isolated, rural, and more vulnerable regions of the country. With PAHO financial and technical support, the Ministry deployed 1,726 vaccination teams to eight remote departments during the second half of 2022 (Ahuachapán, Santa Ana, Sonsonate, La Libertad, San Salvador, La Paz, Usulután, and San Miguel). The teams visited 257,800 homes, administering COVID-19 vaccines, and educating people about their benefits.



In addition, PAHO procured cold chain equipment for El Salvador. Along with training in use of the equipment, PAHO provided training in immunology and vaccination techniques. Further, PAHO has supported El Salvador's efforts to provide the pediatric COVID-19 vaccine. The country's COVID-19 program has led to a 2.9% increase in vaccination coverage, from 63.5% of the population in January 2022 to 66.4% in November 2022.

*Left: A vaccination team in San Carlos in El Salvador's Morazán Department. Photo credit: PAHO 2022*

## Guyana

Vaccine hesitancy is particularly pronounced in the Caribbean region, where nine countries and territories were still below the 40% coverage target as of 11 November 2022. In **Guyana** in the past several months, PAHO has provided technical support to the Ministry of Health to develop a communications campaign focused on the hinterland, where religious and cultural practices have discouraged immunization. With funds from the USG financial contribution, PAHO supported the hiring of communications consultants, who are collaborating with local media and medical personnel to develop and disseminate pro-vaccination messaging.



# PAHO

Focused on five low-coverage regions in Guyana, messaging is being disseminated through social media, radio and television programs and infomercials, newspapers, posters, and brochures, as well as through training sessions. Dialogue to promote COVID-19 vaccination is ongoing with multiple indigenous groups, including the Toashaos.

To enhance Guyana's cold chain capacity, PAHO recently procured 13 solar refrigerators and 11 other more traditional refrigerators, which were distributed to targeted facilities in remote regions. Guyana's interventions have contributed to an 8.2% increase in vaccination coverage, from 39.8% in January to 48% in November of this year.

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