

# THE UNITED NATIONS' SUPPORT TO COVID-19 PREPAREDNESS AND RESPONSE IN PAPUA NEW GUINEA

November 2021



The United Nations in Papua New Guinea has been supporting national efforts to prepare for, respond to, and recover from the COVID-19 pandemic. This includes support to:

- Health Emergency and Humanitarian Coordination
- Clinical Management and Procurement
- Risk Communications and Community Engagement
- Protection and Secondary Impacts
- Socio-Economic Impact and Recovery

To support the Government's preparedness and response plan, UN agencies have secured funding from Australia, India, Japan, New Zealand, United States, and the World Bank. The UN is also engaging with donors to re-programme funding where relevant, as for example with resources available through the Spotlight Initiative to invest into work that will ensure safety for women and girls that are affected by gender-based violence.

In 2021, UN assistance has included support with the procurement, storage, and administration of vaccines, together with support for effective public communications campaigns to combat misinformation and increase vaccine uptake.



*Figure 1. Joint WHO and UNICEF Second Regional INSPIRE Conference on End Violence Against Children during COVID-19 & Beyond.*

By the end October 2021, **more than 242,000 people** had received at least one dose of the COVID-19 vaccine, including:

- **Over 13,000 health care workers**
- **5,882 people over 18 with underlying health conditions** putting them at high risk of severe disease or death if infected with COVID-19.

The country, as of 31 October, had recorded a cumulative total of 28,823 positive COVID-19 cases including 191 identified delta variant cases.

## Health Emergency and Humanitarian Coordination

World Health Organization (WHO) is providing technical, operational, and capacity-building support to the National Department of Health (NDoH) under its lead role in coordinating the country's preparedness for COVID-19 and operationalizing the health-related, communication and logistics pillars of the Pandemic Response Coordination Group created under the National Pandemic Act 2020. WHO also provides strategic and technical advice to the national leadership through the National Control Center (NCC) and at the local levels through the Provincial Emergency Operations Centers (PEOCs).

The UN, as co-chair of the Disaster Management Team (DMT) with Government, is leading the DMT's implementation of a multi-sectoral plan to support the national response. The DMT brings together NGOs, church leaders and donor partners to share information and coordinate international humanitarian assistance for COVID-19 to Papua New Guinea.

WHO convenes and chairs a fortnightly Health Cluster coordination meeting with over 60 partners across the country.

### Partner Mapping Survey

As of 16 November, a partner mapping survey is being created with assistance from WHO, UNDP (with

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assistance from the DMT) and UNOCHA. The survey's intention is to provide PNG Government agencies, and partners, to clearly map where partners are operating throughout all provinces and what resources they have on hand in times of disaster management.

A dashboard will be created for the ease of quickly identifying partners on ground and what resources can be immediately requested for use from the DMT, not just for COVID-19, but also for potential natural disasters in the future.



*Figure 2. Four ambulances donated to Minister of Health by UNDP and funded by the UN-India Partnership Fund.*

## Clinical Management and Health Procurement

Papua New Guinea's COVID-19 response was boosted by United Nations Development Programme's (UNDP) upgrade and procurement of ambulances with the assistance of the United Nations-India Partnership Fund. UNDP facilitated procurement of ten new ambulances and the upgrading of an additional five ambulances to bolster efforts to address the impacts of the latest COVID-19 surge on the country's health system. The first four ambulances were handed to the Minister for Health and HIV, the Honourable Jelta Wong in October. Two of these ambulances were issued to St John Ambulance Health and Emergency Services. UNDP is further sponsoring training and equipping of Ambulance Officers through St John Ambulance, to train new officers in the safe and effective use of these ambulances and emergency equipment. This will facilitate vital emergency care and further strengthen the national health system. In November 2021, UNDP proudly supported the official launch of the Ambulance Service Academy, an initiative to produce frontline health workers. UNDP has

sponsored the first class of 2022, supporting 22 students to save lives and improve ambulance care to people in rural areas of Papua New Guinea.

WHO continues to support the activities to increase the testing capacity in response to the surge in the country. Those include conducting regular meetings for partner coordination to support the COVID-19 response, developing the surge response plan, establishing, and procuring of the laboratory commodities for molecular diagnostics, and capacity building to relevant staffs to perform testing using Antigen Rapid Diagnostics Tests (Ag-RDT), Automated RT-PCR Test (GeneXpert) and Manual RT-PCR Test.

## Surveillance

- Work with the surveillance team to update the testing strategy and conduct training for Ag-RDT testing for rapid identification and isolation,
- Work with surveillance in improving the case notification form to capture testing and genomic sections
- Ensure timely reporting of CIFs/ testing line lists from provinces for daily testing/surveillance updates.
- Assist with the sample collection and CIFs training in NCD and other provinces.



*Figure 3. WHO continues support to conducting regular meetings for partner coordination to support the COVID-19 response.*

## Whole Genomic Sequencing

- Support whole genome sequencing with on-going monitoring of Variants of Concerns (VoCs) with the introduction of Delta variant into the country, through fortnightly meeting with Doherty Institute

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- Provide guidance to the Central Public Health Laboratory (CPHL) with sampling criteria of provincial samples, package, and shipment for WGS
- Develop the sampling strategy for sequencing of positive samples in the event of surge
- Provide cumulative report of genomic sequencing to NCC for reporting and supporting CPHL to report back to provinces
- Work with Doherty Institute and WHO WPRO team to plan for establishing of whole genome sequencing capacity in the country as part of public health laboratory system strengthening.



*Figure 4. WHO and Japanese Government join together to enhance COVID-19 response.*

## Testing

- Support provided to the provincial laboratory team to audit all functioning equipment – BSC and GeneXpert modules
- Mapping out of testing sites and testing platforms for uniformity in testing and reporting
- Work with CPHL, IMR, Air Lab and regional laboratories to establish molecular diagnostics laboratory using manual RT-PCR assay to build capacity and increase throughput.
- Work with CPHL and IMR to develop the plan to implement pooling testing to increase turnaround time and throughout, given the limited supply of reagents and consumables
- Provide Ag-RDT training for all health care workers to test at point of care. Training provided to lab personnel on GeneXpert testing.

## Testing Commodities

- Ensure all testing commodities are made available for an un-interrupted testing service and request for commodities is through a developed requisition form

- Work with logistics team and partners to consolidate, procure and facilitate the supply chain system for the laboratory commodities
- Develop an inventory for all molecular testing (PCR) for ease of procurement and estimates of procurement cost for ongoing testing.

## Provincial Lab Visits

- Conduct joint field visit with NCC, NDoH and relevant stakeholders to investigate, assess, coach and mentor to ensure smooth, safe, and quality laboratory operation and referral of sample for testing

## System Strengthening

- Coordinate with all COVID-19 laboratories, WHO WPRO and EQA panel provider to participate in the EQAS program as part of the quality assurance
- Audit for all waste management through incinerators availability, SOP for disposal and liaise with other partners for waste management support
- Identifying errors and providing corrective actions for quality testing



*Figure 5. Vaccination carried out in Gaire village, Central Province.*

## Vaccination

- UNICEF has supported the distribution of more than:
  - 350,000 doses of the AstraZeneca vaccines
  - 287,000 doses of J&J vaccines
  - 46,000 doses of Sinopharm vaccines
- The vaccines distributed have been received in the country through support from the various Governments, Australia, and New Zealand

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donated the AstraZeneca doses; the J&J vaccine is a donation from USA while the Sinopharm vaccines have been donated by China.

- Through support provided by GAVI, UNICEF, in collaboration with the National Department of Health, is facilitating the distribution and installation of over 355 cold chain equipment in 22 provinces to support capacity for the storage of vaccine doses for both routine immunization and the COVID-19 vaccination program. These include 224 solar vaccine fridges, 109 Ice lined refrigerators and 22 ice pack freezers. Out of these, 84 of the fridges have been installed and commissioned so far in six provinces - National Capital District, Central, New Ireland, Morobe, Western Highlands and Chimbu provinces. The other equipment's are expected to be commissioned by the end of 2021.



**Figure 6.** Support provided by GAVI, UNICEF, in collaboration with NDoH facilitates distribution & installation of over 355 cold chain equipment.

## PPE Distribution

UNFPA is reaching out to all Gender-Based Violence service providers to help coordinate PPE needs and distribution.



**Figure 7.** UNFPA social media engagement with online audience to promote health practices for women.

## Risk Communications and Community Engagement

WHO and UNICEF, with support of NDOH, developed and continue to adapt the country's COVID-19 risk communications and community engagement (RCCE) plan.

WHO continues to support overall RCCE efforts, with focus on vaccine communication - encouraging vaccine uptake and dispelling myths and misinformation - and re-enforcing Niupela Pasin (non-pharmaceutical) measures to encourage behavior change. The organization co-represents the RCCE cluster at the National Taskforce, integrating risk communications and community engagement into the national strategy.

Through the Risk Communications and Community Engagement Cluster, WHO has developed appropriate messages to promote swabbing to increase the testing coverage and provides names and locations of testing sites for RCCE cluster members to distribute.

UNICEF has supported the development, printing and launch of the *CHURCHES PERSPECTIVE ON COVID-19 VACCINE*. The launch of the booklet ushers in the regional church leaders' workshops to engage pastors and churches across the country, planned to be completed during November.

UNFPA organized a virtual Youth COVID-19 Info Session, a dialogue led by UNICEF with support from WHO in PNG. It provided a platform for discussion with young people to raise awareness about COVID-19, vaccines, and the situation in PNG. In addition, it was an opportunity for young leaders to discuss what can be done to contribute to addressing this pandemic, especially misinformation.

## Content Development

WHO, UNICEF and UNFPA have supported the development of multi-media content to promote vaccination and non-pharmaceutical interventions including:

- Placement of 65 TV spots, 290 radio spots and six Newspaper placements reaching 2.5 million people
- Design and text for 'Sleeves Up' campaign materials (posters and brochures)
- Production of 'Vaccine Champions' campaign videos

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- Text and graphics for radio and newspaper campaigns
- Preparation of press releases on key vaccine milestones and activities
- Social media content production and distribution
- Support to FAQs for COVID-19 hotline staff

## Public Transport

- Through funding provided by the European Union for the COVID-19 response, an estimated 300,000 road users in Port Moresby, Lae, Madang, Goroka, Kundiawa, Hagen, Wabag and Mendi are being reached with a public messaging campaign encouraging the uptake of the COVID-19 vaccination and reinforcing adherence to the Niupela Pasin measures.
- This campaign is deployed via 20 public transport buses servicing major city routes in Port Moresby and 20 public motor vehicles that provide transportation services along the Highlands Highway.
- In addition, UNICEF supported an awareness raising placement of 13 bus stop billboards in NCD. The billboards feature vaccine champions and awareness raising messages on the importance of vaccination in controlling the spread of the virus.



Figure 8. Public messaging campaign funding provided by European Union for the COVID-19 response.

## Social media

- WHO coordinates the RCCE social media subgroup which leads social listening through:
  - Tracking comments on institution and organization social media pages and group pages
  - Compiling feedback from community engagement
  - Meltwater automated key word tracking
  - Regular media monitoring

- 'Dark social' monitoring of key groups
- The sub-group uses these insights to develop a social media wrap to share with partners, businesses, and influencers, which contains content to counter the key misinformation detected through social listening
- UNFPA reached over 5,000 people with COVID-19 related messages through its social media platforms, and printouts of COVID-19 and GBV briefing note distributed on UNFPA's flagship events, including during the Bilum campaign launch.



Figure 9. UNDP facilitating advocacy efforts of the Parliamentary Committee and associated Coalition of Parliamentarians to end GBV in PNG.

- UNDP continues to support the delivery to target audiences of COVID-19 related key messages by UN agencies, community, and government partners. UNDP is honouring its longer-term commitment to facilitate advocacy efforts of the Parliamentary Committee and associated Coalition of Parliamentarians to end gender-based violence, using various platforms, to highlight news, issues and key milestones and events.

## Advocacy and health worker engagement

WHO has led training for health workers across Papua New Guinea including:

- Training for national vaccine and health promotion officers
- Supporting these national officers during provincial missions as part of Phase 2 roll out: PHA advocacy, training of health promotion officers, mobile clinics
- Supporting HCW training and advocacy sessions

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- Developing community engagement tools including flash cards, storytelling tools and community discussion guides
- Developing health worker tools, including FAQs

UNICEF has facilitated the production of a training package focused on interpersonal communication, community engagement, rumour management, communication planning and implementation and monitoring and evaluation of social mobilization support to increase vaccine uptake.



*Figure 10. Southern Region Health Promotion Officers Training on COVID-19 Vaccine demand generation and community engagement.*

## Protection and Secondary Impacts

Recognizing that this is broader than just a health emergency and that many aspects of peoples' lives are impacted by COVID-19, the UN is also monitoring and preparing to respond to secondary impacts.

UN Women, UNDP, UNAIDS, OHCHR and UNFPA have been engaging with National Capital District and the national and provincial partners on protection concerns for high-risk populations, including people living with TB, HIV and people living with disabilities and on matters such as sexual and gender-based violence (GBV). UNFPA will provide support to ensure key essential health services on SRH and GBV (i.e., Family Support Centre) are operational in the duration of the COVID-19 pandemic.

WHO continues to monitor disease trends in people in Papua New Guinea and support essential health services, particularly maternal and child health, HIV/AIDS, tuberculosis and vaccine-preventable diseases and the implementation of routine immunization.

UNDP continues preparedness and response efforts in support of civil society. UNDP grantee, Femili PNG, has delivered tailored training aimed at ensuring relevant government authorities, especially at sub-national levels, have better knowledge and capacity to deliver quality and coordinated essential services for survivors of violence, especially those facing multiple and intersecting forms of discrimination and ensure access to justice. Femili PNG has reached:

- 166 community leaders (41 females, 125 males) with information on understanding of Family Sexual Violence, its consequences and related laws and referral pathways.
- Community leaders empowered to take action in supporting survivors of Family and Sexual Violence and to model good behaviour.
- 74 police officers, village court officials and magistrates (30 females, 44 males) to deliver better services to survivors of Family and Sexual Violence through specialist training on understanding what GBV is, application of laws, trauma-informed care, and case management of survivors.



*Figure 11. UNFPA Fact sheet publication of the impact of COVID-19 on maternal health and family planning in PNG.*

## Gender-Based Violence

- UNFPA as Co-Chair of GBVSC (Gender-based Violence Sub-Cluster) and SRH SC (Sexual and Reproductive Health Sub-Cluster) is collecting weekly GBV and SRH service monitoring and is preparing rapid gender analysis.
- UNFPA is doing weekly GBV service monitoring.
- UNDP is supporting the Parliamentary Committee on Gender-Based Violence to host the 2<sup>nd</sup> Public Hearings on Gender-based Violence, in December 2021. This follows the Parliamentary Committee's Report prepared following its first hearings earlier this year. The report's 71 key

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recommendations were tabled in Parliament and submitted for 2022 Budget review.

- Additional key support provided by UNDP – includes:
  - MoU signing between the Department for Community Development and Religion and UNDP to extend support to 11 non-Spotlight provinces.
  - Preparations to launch Enga and Jiwaka Provincial gender-based violence Plans and Milne Bay's Provincial gender-based violence strategy.
  - Launch of the website for the National gender-based violence Secretariat.



*Figure 12. Support provided to NDoE to implement PNG's Education Emergency Response and Recovery Plan (EERRP).*

## Child Protection

- UNICEF, in partnership with ChildFund continues to support the 1 Tok Kaunselin Helpline ensuring that it remains operational. This includes providing an on-going 24-hour service increased focus on the provision of mental health and psychosocial support to children, parents and caregivers through case management, referrals, counselling, and crisis intervention support. Additional counsellors and information officers have been recruited and are trained to help in the response.
- A recent partnership review with Child Fund during the reporting period highlighted the following key achievements of the Helpline since the partnership started in January 2021:
  - 1,349 children (740 males and 609 females) have received MHPSS support

- 3,731 parents and caregivers (1,779 females and 1,948 males, 4 other) have received MHPSS support
- 1,038 children (657 females and 342 males, and 39 other) affected by GBV have received case management support
- Recently, UNICEF further extended its support to Child Fund to ensure the continuation of essential services focusing on building the capacity of service providers to manage cases of the survivors of violence, in a timely manner.

## Education

With the support of Global Partnership for Education (GPE) and the Government of Australia, UNICEF in collaboration with partners - Save the Children, ChildFund and World Vision - continue to support the National Department of Education (NDoE) to implement PNG's Education Emergency Response and Recovery Plan (EERRP) in NCD, Lae, Madang, Western, Sandaun and the Autonomous Region of Bougainville (ARoB).



*Figure 13. The RACHEL (Remote Area Community Hotspot Education Learning) offline software application funded by GPE and the Australian Government.*

- Save the Children with the support of UNICEF are converting 25 decodable books into talking eBooks for the Bloom Reader App which was originally conceived by the Summer Institute of Linguistics. In addition, 82 open-source elementary level books and NDoE Shell Books which align with the Standards Based Curriculum (SBC), have also been converted into talking eBooks. Owned by the NDoE, these books have since been repackaged for the NDoE EERRP efforts and shared with the eLearning Division for

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use as read aloud on television and online media platforms.

- A pilot program targeting 25 elementary schools in NCD will provide digital classroom libraries filled with culturally relevant, age appropriate, original content for children in Papua New Guinea. The 40 tablets come in a custom designed commercial grade lockable transport case pre-loaded with both core reading relating to the curriculum as well as hundreds more carefully curated titles.
- The Education in Emergency Response and Recovery Plan will see 450 targeted schools in NCD, Morobe, Madang, Western and Sandaun provinces receive a phone containing over 15 knowledge products produced through the response, as well as a preloaded app to upload their school census data to support monitoring and panning in NDoE.
- In addition, 5,000 micro-SD cards have been loaded with NDoE syllabus documents and EERRP learning materials including the Home Learning Packs and Booster Packs as well as two free reading apps (Library for All and Bloom Reader).
- While still in development, the ICT division have loaded over 3,300 learning items relating to PNG curriculum from preparatory to grade 12 onto the My PNG Home Study Page set to be launched in 2022. <http://myhomestudy.education.gov.pg>
- The ICT division will also pilot portable, battery-powered devices known as *Remote Area Community Hotspot for Education and Learning* (RACHEL) in seven schools in NCD, six schools in Madang, five schools in Kiunga and two in Telefomin. The RACHEL device contains copies of education websites in offline format and act as a server designed for use in schools, or places of learning worldwide where internet access is limited or does not exist. Up to 50 users can connect simultaneously to the device and access the information on the e-Library.

## Water and Sanitation Hygiene

UNICEF has led activities to support WaSH projects around the country. Through support provided by the Government of Japan:

- More than 16 communities in Rigo District, Central Province have achieved an 'Open Defecation Free' (ODF) status following the construction of proper and safe toilets for each household that was carried out in October. This

is impacting positively on more than 3,200 people who live in these communities. To date, 42 communities that 8,400 people call home, have been declared ODF since this work began in May 2021 having toilet, tippy tap, and soap for handwashing. An additional 12 communities in Rigo have also already started toilet constructions for households and are working hard to achieve an open defecation free status.

- More than 6,000 students including 2,800 females will soon have access to safe toilets including change rooms and incinerators to support menstrual hygiene management, safe drinking water and handwashing facilities once construction is completed in 26 schools.
- The establishment of school Hygiene Clubs continue to grow. To date, Hygiene Clubs set up in 20 schools are being used as an avenue to promote good health practices and behaviour change. Up to 2,000 students are being reached with key information on good sanitation and hygiene practices.



*Figure 14. Through assistance provided by the Government of Japan, UNICEF support to WaSH projects in PNG.*

With support from the EU, the completion of rehabilitation work on Gravity Fed Systems in five communities – \_Kasuka, Wana, Gain, Bandong and Torowa – \_in Nawaeb District in Morobe Province now provides more than 1,500 people easy access to safe drinking water. More GFS rehabilitation work is ongoing in five more communities in Goroka while the construction of 10 GFS water systems will start in November in Mt. Hagen and Central Bougainville.