

Strategies for Navigating Health Commodity Procurement in Humanitarian Settings

International Medical Corps' emergency-planning processes, including a robust program for prepositioning medical commodities, helped to make it the first international NGO to be classified by the WHO as an Emergency Medical Team Type I (fixed and mobile) provider, capable of responding to a disaster anywhere in the world within 48 hours.

BACKGROUND

International Medical Corps is a global humanitarian organization dedicated to saving lives and relieving suffering. With more than 7,300 staff around the world, International Medical Corps responds to emergencies, offers medical services and strengthens local healthcare systems through training and capacity-building.

As Head of Global Procurement for International Medical Corps, Nikola Usenovic leads a team of eight procurement specialists who manage international sourcing of medical and nonmedical commodities and services for approximately 30 country missions and three headquarters offices. He has participated in numerous emergency responses, including Typhoon Yolanda in the Philippines, Ebola outbreaks in Africa, and the COVID-19 pandemic.



PRACTICE

In 2020, International Medical Corps' global procurement unit formed a dedicated COVID-19 sourcing team, led by Mr. Usenovic. The team has successfully procured and delivered large quantities of verified personal protective equipment (PPE) to the International Medical Corps hub in Dubai, as well as to countries in Africa, Asia, Europe, and the United States. The team introduced several additional control steps to identify fake and substandard PPE; these controls are now standard for the organization.

These developments are part of a decade-long process to continuously evolve the emergency preparedness and prepositioning strategies for medical commodities within the organization. Prepositioning critical medical supplies—including water, sanitation and hygiene products, shelters and communications equipment—is a vital part of ensuring timely response to crises, especially during rapid onset emergencies like earthquakes. The Ebola outbreaks in West Africa and the Democratic Republic of Congo were a prelude to the COVID-19 pandemic for procurement of PPE and provided significant learning for many organizations, including International Medical Corps.

During the Ebola outbreaks, International Medical Corps negotiated with one of the major PPE manufacturers to secure an annual fixed price, which led to more accurate

Location: Global

Organization: International Medical Corps

Setting: Emergency response

SCM area: Commodity procurement

HR cadres using this practice:
Logistics officers, procurement officers, emergency managers

budgets and collaborative forecasting. International Medical Corps' future needs were then taken into consideration when the manufacturer planned its production volume, and the organization made direct purchases with price matching from the distributors.

Similarly, contractual obligations with suppliers enabled International Medical Corps to hold and keep fresh WHO and UNFPA kits, which has become part of their global blanket purchase agreements (BPAs). Multiple BPAs with USAID/Bureau of Humanitarian Assistance-qualified suppliers that are strategically geo-positioned in the European Union, Middle East, and Asia have increased International Medical Corps' preparedness. In June 2021, International Medical Corps became the first international nongovernmental organization in the world to be classified by the World Health Organization as an [Emergency Medical Team Type 1](#) provider (fixed and mobile), capable of deploying quickly and providing medical services in response to a disaster anywhere in the world. It collaborated with several suppliers, including corporate supporter FedEx, to achieve this goal. In August 2021, the EMT was put to the test following a 7.2-magnitude earthquake in Haiti. In coordination with the Pan American Health Organization, and funded by USAID/Bureau of Humanitarian Assistance, International Medical Corps deployed its emergency team and supplies to Haiti in less than 48 hours from getting the go-ahead, and was seeing patients mere hours after that. Some key lessons included the following.

Consider a modular approach when possible, depending on the prepositioned stock and intended use. This may reduce shipping costs, as well as wasted supplies, which are common in emergencies. A modular approach can help organizations manage supplies more efficiently—but keep in mind the general rule that “it’s better to have and not need than to need and not have.”

Pack dangerous, controlled, or cold-chain items separately and list them under each category on the Air Waybill (AWB). This reduces the likelihood that these items will hold up entire shipments during import. A best practice is to hire a licensed third party to manage this, as rules change frequently and destinations are often unknown until a disaster hits. Controlled substances often cannot be included in rapid deployment, because the import and export licensing process can take several weeks.

Map global presence, ability, and speed to import emergency goods that are prepositioned, to identify gaps and figure out in advance how to resolve them. Lack of consignees is one of the most common bottlenecks for rapid deployment in an emergency. To avert delays, think of solutions with partners who have a presence in the destination country, who have experience importing medical commodities, and who are licensed to do so.

Learn more about International Medical Corps' procurement practices in [this video](#).



PRACTICE AREA ESSENTIALS

Commodity Procurement

Effective supply chains depend on receiving the right goods at the right time while managing the right amount of risk.

The procurement officer needs to know:

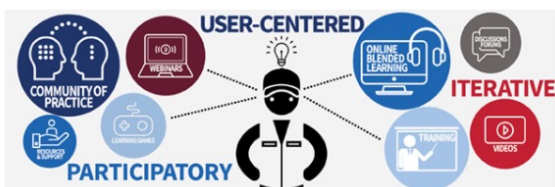
- Key challenges of procuring health commodities
- Reliable partnerships, especially in times of crisis
- Rules and regulations of the local government and funding agency

[Learn more about procurement](#)

[Access the full version of the Supply Chain Manager's Handbook](#)

For more information about this practice, contact JSI.

Building Capacity to Improve Pharmaceutical and Medical Commodity Management in Humanitarian and Disaster Settings Project



The [Building Capacity to Improve Pharmaceutical and Medical Commodity Management in Humanitarian and Disaster Settings Project](#) improves the capacity of people who manage health supply chains in humanitarian settings. It helps staff from international organizations and local NGOs to manage pharmaceutical and medical commodities by equipping them with training, guidance, resources, and follow-up support. JSI Research & Training Institute, Inc. manages the project, which is funded by USAID's Bureau for Humanitarian Assistance.