



MOBILE HEALTH SERVICES INCREASE COVID-19 VACCINATIONS IN PAKISTAN

LOCAL GOVERNMENT OFFICIALS USE A USAID-SUPPORTED MONTHLY COORDINATION MEETING TO QUICKLY GET COVID-19 SHOTS IN ARMS

In a remote district located along Pakistan's border with Afghanistan, the director of the Rehabilitation Center for Drug Addicts (RCDA) was worried that his clients, who live full time at the center, were not able to get vaccinated for COVID-19. "It is a great responsibility to run institutions like rehabilitation centers. It is difficult for us to take such patients to even the nearest vaccination center," said Shoaib Khan, RCDA director.

Although the local department of health set up COVID-19 vaccination centers in major hospitals and city centers, people who are underserved and/or live in remote areas are not able to access these vaccination sites easily. For clients at the Rehabilitation Center for Drug Addicts, their fragile health status is a key barrier preventing them from traveling to the vaccination centers for COVID-19 shots.

Fortunately, Mr. Khan was able to address this issue at a health coordination meeting for district government officials who work across several sectors of government, including health, social welfare, education, and finance. Called District Health and Population Management Team (DHPMT) meetings, the standing monthly meetings were introduced with financial and coordination support from USAID, but have since taken on a life of their own as local government officials, like Mr. Khan, see and experience their value.

At the January 2022 DHPMT meeting, Mr. Khan, in his capacity as the district social welfare officer and RCDA director, mentioned that the RCDA clients need to be vaccinated for COVID-19. Hearing this, the district health officer (DHO) informed the meeting participants that a mobile health services unit (MHSU) is available, thanks to USAID support, to bring COVID-19 vaccinations to people who cannot travel to vaccination centers in cities and hospitals.



The USAID-supported Integrated Health Systems Strengthening and Service Delivery (IHSS-SD) Activity, implemented by JSI, has worked with the provincial department of health to operationalize three MHSUs and to train health workers to use the MHSUs, educate people about the benefits of COVID-19 vaccinations, follow COVID-19 vaccination standard operating procedures, and enter client vaccination data into district, provincial, and national data registers.

In March 2022, the MHSU van arrived at RCDA and vaccinated 49 clients for COVID-19. Although five clients did not have national identity cards or registration numbers, they still got vaccinated and the MHSU health providers added their names manually to the district data register.

“I am really thankful for the support by USAID for providing platforms like the DHPMT [meeting], where we can discuss and solve our challenges. Moreover, the MHSU van provided COVID-19 vaccination to our [clients], which will give them protection against COVID-19. It would have been [very hard] to control the virus if any one of the patients caught it, because they live in close contact,” said Mr. Khan.