

Supporting the **COVID-19** Response in Pakistan

Ensuring Health Workers Have the Knowledge and Skills to Combat COVID-19 and Prevent Future Pandemics



Intensive care unit staff participate in a training on the management of critical cases of COVID-19, in which they are learning to use a ventilator donated by the U.S. government.

BACKGROUND

To support the government of Pakistan's response to the COVID-19 pandemic, USAID's Integrated Health Systems Strengthening and Service Delivery (IHSS-SD) Activity is strengthening the capacity of the public health system at three levels: system, institutional, and individual. This support is helping provincial and district health departments, health facilities, and health workers improve their readiness to react, report, and respond to COVID-19 and future disease outbreaks.

APPROACH

The IHSS-SD team provided training for health facility staff on how to triage and treat COVID-19 patients, which has helped ease the pressure on over-burdened facilities, particularly hospitals, by ensuring patients with mild to moderate COVID-19 receive treatment and stay at home. The Activity trained hospital staff on infection prevention and control measures, educating them on standard operating procedures for treating COVID-19 patients and protecting themselves from contracting the disease. The IHSS-SD Activity provided training at all

hospitals that received donated ventilators from the U.S. government, ensuring intensive care unit staff (medics and paramedics) know how to manage care for critically ill patients on ventilators. The Activity also supported training for doctors on how to manage care for patients with mild to moderate cases of COVID-19.

The USAID-supported Integrated Health Systems Strengthening and Service Delivery (IHSS-SD) Activity is strengthening the institutional, technical, and leadership capacities of three provincial departments of health: Sindh, Punjab, and Khyber Pakhtunkhwa.



At the community level, the IHSS-SD Activity supported a training of trainers for lady health workers on how to counsel families to care for family members with mild cases of COVID-19 and how to know when to bring them to the health facility, should their conditions deteriorate. This training was critical for encouraging home-based care so as not to unnecessarily overwhelm hospitals and health clinics with mild cases of COVID-19.



The IHSS-SD Activity strengthened the capacity of thousands of health workers across the country, significantly strengthening Pakistan's COVID-19 response:

- **More than 3000 staff in the district health offices across the country were trained as Rapid Response Teams for active disease surveillance, sample collection from the hot spots and monitoring the disease outbreak trends.**
- **More than 1,000 health providers know how to manage care for COVID-19 patients on ventilators in intensive care units.**
- **More than 10,000 health providers in hospitals have received infection prevention and control training to mitigate the spread of COVID-19.**
- **More than 1,600 hospital-based health providers in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa know how to manage care for patients with mild to moderate cases of COVID-19.**
- **More than 46,000 lady health workers have received training on how to provide home-based care for people with mild cases of COVID-19.**
- **Almost 50 focal people working at the newly strengthened District Disease Surveillance and Response Units in two provinces (Khyber Pakhtunkhwa and Sindh) have completed a short course on infectious and notifiable diseases, better preparing them to detect and respond to current and future infectious disease outbreaks.**

All training materials and curricula were either developed or adapted by the IHSS-SD Activity team in collaboration with provincial health departments. Additionally, IHSS-SD established and operationalized two Centers of Excellence in Khyber-Pakhtunkhwa province, which are located in Swat and Swabi. The Centers of Excellence

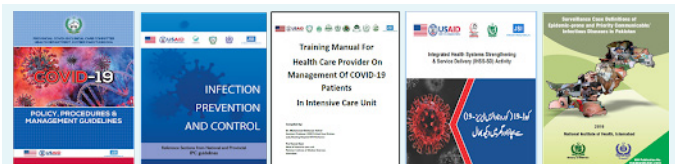
were created to strengthen the capacity of health workers with a specific focus on infectious diseases and have been used to provide in-service training for health workers on the COVID-19 response. The Centers of Excellence represent a sustainable intervention that the KP DOH successfully leveraged to quickly respond to a public health emergency.

RESULTS

The IHSS-SD Activity was instrumental in strengthening Pakistan's national workforce capacity to react, report, and respond to the COVID-19 pandemic. At the district level, the IHSS-SD Activity trained rapid response teams were trained across all the districts for active case detection, sample collection from the suspected cases, and monitoring suspected hotspots. In communities, IHSS-SD engaged and trained the community-based workforce, i.e., LHWs, to transmit vital information to households where mild cases of COVID-19 were confined. This eased the pressure on hospitals dealing with moderate to severe cases. Likewise, strengthening the capacity of hospital staff to manage cases of COVID-19 in isolation wards, quarantines, and intensive care units helped improve the level of preparedness of the health system to manage patient care, following the standardized clinical protocols according to case definitions.

WAY FORWARD

Provincial departments of health now have a critical mass of master trainers, who can roll out training to build the capacity of health care providers. In the interest of sustainability, departments of health should monitor that these trainings occur regularly to ensure that health facilities and health providers maintain their readiness to respond to COVID-19 and other disease outbreaks.



COVID-19 training materials developed and/or adapted by the USAID IHSS-SD Activity in partnership with National Health Institute, Mo/NHSR&C, and provincial departments of health.