

Integrated Primary Care Program (IPCP)

Providing CHWs in Togo with Training, Personal Protective Equipment (PPE),
and Mental Health Support during COVID-19



Introduction

COVID-19 has expanded the important role that Community Health Workers (CHWs) play in delivering primary healthcare services to young children and their families. In Togo, for example, CHWs who traditionally deliver home-based services to pregnant women and children also began working to prevent the spread of COVID-19 in their communities. To assist with this transition, [Integrate Health](#) used its Integrated Primary Care Program (IPCP) to provide CHWs with training, personal protective equipment (PPE), and mental health support during the pandemic (Integrate Health, 2020).

Overview of Integrated Primary Care Program (IPCP)

In 2015, Integrate Health launched IPCP to bring high quality, primary healthcare to women and children under the age of five. Under IPCP, Integrate Health works with governments and local communities to create a patient-centered health system that is accountable to the community and reduces mortality in resource-limited settings. It focuses on the following areas:

- **Community Health Workers (CHWs).** Ensuring that CHWs are trained, equipped, supervised, and salaried to expand the reach of the healthcare system to patients' front doors.



- **Clinical Capacity-Building.** Training peer coaches to provide clinical mentorship to nurses and midwives in public clinics to develop high quality and competent care providers and ensure effective care.
- **Supply Chain and Infrastructure.** Training pharmacy managers to ensure that patients have the medicines and products they need to stay healthy.
- **User Fee Removal.** Removing user fees for pregnant women and children under the age of five to ensure that all patients can access healthcare (Integrate Health, 2020).

As of July 2021, IPCP had reached over 204,000 people across 25 health centers in the Kozah, Bassar, Dankpen, Keran, and Binah districts (Integrate Health, 2021).

Integrate Health's COVID-19 Response



Delivery of a certificate of completion of training to CHW, Badjona Djilalo

In March 2020, Integrate Health worked with the Government to implement several measures to ensure that CHWs were well equipped to protect themselves and support their communities during COVID-19. These measures included providing CHWs with:

- **COVID-19 training.** Integrate Health has provided training to 202 CHWs in the Kara region. This training, led by program directors, supervisors, medical directors and regional team members, provided CHWs with information on how to continue delivering essential primary healthcare services while protecting themselves and limiting the spread of COVID-19. CHWs were also trained on how to use infrared thermometers that allowed them to take their patient's temperatures without touching them. To comply with social distancing best practices, all training sessions were held outdoors in small groups and all participants were required to wear masks. After undergoing a one-day training, CHWs went door-to-door to raise awareness on COVID-19, provide members of their community with key health messages, and dispel rumors about the virus.
- **Personal Protective Equipment (PPE).** Although Integrate Health had already provided its CHWs with certain PPE items (e.g., gloves, hand sanitizer) and reinforced important health practices (e.g., hand washing) prior to COVID-19, it worked with

Direct Relief, the COVID-19 Action Fund Africa (CAF-Africa), and the Ministry of Health to rapidly procure additional PPE items (e.g., surgical masks, face shields) for all 7,500 CHWs in the country during the pandemic.

- **Mental Health Support Sessions.** Led by mental health professionals, these sessions were designed to increase CHW morale, address any anxieties they were facing regarding COVID-19, and teach them strategies to manage their stress during the pandemic (Integrate Health, 2020).

Enablers and Barriers to Implementation

CHWs' experience with IPCP has been overwhelmingly positive. As a result of the COVID-19 training and stress management sessions they received, CHWs reported feeling valued and motivated to continue carrying out their work during the pandemic. Integrate Health staff would also visit CHWs regularly in the field to reinforce the importance of their work, which was another factor that helped boost morale. Lastly, the PPE that Direct Relief and CAF-Africa provided helped ensure that these workers were protected as they continued to provide essential services to members of their community.

Despite the training they received, CHWs continued to express fears of contracting COVID-19 while carrying out home visits. To address this challenge, workers were encouraged to attend the stress management training sessions that were led by mental health professionals. Additionally, Integrate Health offered CHWs the option of opting out of providing service with full paid leave for any reason. Despite this offering, all workers elected to continue working and serving their communities. Another challenge that they faced was the fact that some community members refused to let them into their homes for fear of contracting COVID-19. In response to this issue, Integrate Health equipped CHWs with key COVID-19 information from the World Health Organization (WHO) to dispel rumors and address misinformation about the virus (Integrate Health, 2020). They were also provided with visual aids (e.g., books with laminated photo cards) to use when educating community members about COVID-19. Lastly, after providing these workers with training, supervisors or program team members would accompany them during home visits to reinforce the messages they were delivering and alleviate the fears and resistance of the families under their care.

IPCP's Impact

Despite the challenges triggered by COVID-19, Integrate Health has continued to play an instrumental role in supporting CHWs in Togo. By providing these workers with essential training, PPE, and mental health support, Integrate Health is ensuring that they have the knowledge, tools, and resources to continue supporting their communities during the pandemic. As IPCP expands to other districts in Togo, it could serve as a useful reference for countries interested in strengthening the training and working conditions of their home visiting workforce beyond COVID-19.

References

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