

# Puerto Rico



**The Category 5 storm Hurricane Irma hit the Atlantic basin the week of September 5, 2017, maintaining maximum intensity for 37 hours and leaving 1 million people in Puerto Rico without power.**

As the small island was still reeling from this first powerful storm, Hurricane María followed less than two weeks later, directly hitting Puerto Rico on September 20. Both storms were catastrophic to the island, home to 3.4 million U.S. citizens—leveling homes, destroying health facilities and damaging critical infrastructure.

International Medical Corps is responding in Puerto Rico, Florida, and across the Caribbean to ensure families are safe and have the resources they need to recover in the aftermath of these devastating hurricanes.



Having arrived in Puerto Rico within days of Hurricane Maria, International Medical Corps continues to collaborate with La Asociación de Salud Primaria de Puerto Rico (ASPPR), a network of 76 health clinics focused on providing care to low-income families across the island.

In December, we expanded our efforts to help Puerto Ricans access health care through mobile medical units, which provided home visits for patients in hard-hit communities who are unable to travel to health facilities for treatment. Our team is also assessing how we can support the supply of medications across the island, especially those that require cold storage and transport.

As immediate relief efforts shift to recovery, International Medical Corps will continue to provide power, clean water, communications and cash grants to 45 health facilities and local clinics that reach more than 202,408 people.



In Puerto Rico, International Medical Corps has:

- ▶ Consulted 955 patients
- ▶ Impacted 202,408 patients
- ▶ Assisted 831 local health clinic staff
- ▶ Distributed 14,791 hygiene kits
- ▶ Supported 45 health centers through grants for emergency operations, staff care, rehabilitation/repair and improved infrastructure
- ▶ Protected nearly \$100,000 of pharmaceuticals and vaccines against loss

## PRIMARY HEALTH CARE

Recognizing a significant downturn in patient consultations in the weeks and months after the storm, International Medical Corps' partner facilities adjusted their service provision to focus on more community outreach. The need quickly outpaced the human resource capacity required for health centers to continue this effort. International Medical Corps partnered with five federally-qualified health centers to augment their clinical outreach and to support expanded diagnostics and treatment in hard-to-reach areas. In total, International Medical Corps deployed 20 volunteer doctors and nurses in 6 teams to support mobile medical centers across the island.

Most of the patients consulted had missed regular appointments, reporting that primary and preventative health care had become less of a priority in the face of increased survival activities, such as waiting in line for gas, purchasing ice, water and food, and repairing homes. Others could not leave their homes while waiting for inspectors to assess damage or out of fear of leaving their belongings unattended and unsecured. Many patients had gone weeks without regular prescriptions, causing their chronic conditions to worsen. International Medical Corps volunteers helped expand the reach of clinical services in rural communities to address these needs. Equally as important, the support from medical volunteers gave health workers, many of whom had been responding since the storms hit, an opportunity to take a break and begin addressing their own needs. In total, International Medical Corps has provided consultations for 955 patients in 46 municipalities/barrios.



## REBUILDING CRITICAL INFRASTRUCTURE

Approximately 40% of Puerto Rico remains without power. Power outages continue to make it difficult to operate health facilities, with many clinics resorting to limiting their hours of operation or providing care in smaller spaces that can be powered by a generator. International Medical Corps provided generators to 7 clinics and San Juan-area hospitals that would otherwise have had severely limited or no operating capacity, resulting in an additional 1,800 clinic hours. As the power grid comes back online, generators are being relocated to health clinics in greater need, ensuring that more clinics are able to provide uninterrupted access to care.

Maintaining an adequate cold chain for life-saving medications, especially those for chronic care, as well as critical vaccines has been an ongoing challenge. Most facilities lacked essential redundancy infrastructure in the event of power failure. International Medical Corps supported four clinics to install solar panels and one facility to install a backup battery system to power facility refrigerators to prevent the loss of essential medicines and vaccines. We also worked with a partner organization to install satellite internet capabilities in 11 local health facilities to ensure continuous access to electronic medical records.

## NUTRITION

The effects of Hurricane Maria on the Puerto Rican power and water infrastructure had a particularly negative impact on lactating women with infants and young children. In addition to unreliable power and safe water access, transportation problems, inappropriate formula distribution, inadequate support for breastfeeding from health professionals and family, and a lack of fresh and nutritious food, as well as increased stress, caused significant challenges for mothers and resulted in a reduction of appropriate infant and young child feeding practices. To address these concerns post-Maria, International Medical Corps, in coordination with the Department of Health, launched a program to promote healthy infant and young child feeding (IYCF) practices.

Through our two partners, La Liga de La Leche and Alimentacion Segura Infantil, International Medical Corps is supporting pregnant and lactating women around the island by providing individual breastfeeding counseling and facilitation of mother support group sessions. International Medical Corps is also providing breastfeeding support items, re-lactation materials and baby kits to expecting families or families with infants and young children. To increase community support and adoption of IYCF practices, International Medical Corps is raising awareness in the community through workshops, radio spots and social media content that focus on the life-saving effects of breastfeeding. The counseling sessions, support groups, and workshops will equip mothers, families and the community with the necessary knowledge and skills to ensure healthy infant and young child nutrition in the event of future natural disasters.



## WATER, SANITATION, AND HYGIENE (WASH)

Without electricity, Puerto Rico's residents cannot pump water into their homes for cooking, bathing or flushing the toilet. While water services have been restored for most, there remain significant health concerns due to a lack of reliable drinking water in several municipalities. International Medical Corps has provided water bladders with a 500-gallon storage capacity to 6 health facilities to help increase access to potable water. Four health centers have used grant funds to repair or improve facility water systems with projects including well rehabilitation, cistern replacement, and the reparation of water pumps. We have also distributed 14,791 hygiene kits, as well as wound care kits, solar lights and other supplies to help families stay healthy in the aftermath of the hurricane.





**International  
Medical Corps**

[www.InternationalMedicalCorps.org](http://www.InternationalMedicalCorps.org)

A preeminent First Responder for more than 30 years, International Medical Corps has provided emergency relief to those struck by disaster, no matter where they are, no matter what the conditions, working with them to recover, rebuild and, through training, gain the skills and tools required to achieve self-reliance.

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