

# Puerto Rico

**Two catastrophic hurricanes, Irma and Maria, devastated the tiny island of Puerto Rico in September 2017. The storms leveled homes, destroyed health facilities and damaged critical infrastructure, leaving much of the island without power for nearly a year.**

International Medical Corps arrived in Puerto Rico within days of Hurricane Maria. Today, we continue essential recovery work in collaboration with La Asociación de Salud Primaria de Puerto Rico (ASPPR), a network of more than 70 federally qualified health clinics focused on providing care to low-income families across the island. Our work includes supporting mobile medical units and providing power, clean water and communications, while working to strengthen the island's emergency response system.

## EMERGENCY PHASE

In the aftermath of Hurricane Maria, International Medical Corps began working with ASPPR to ensure that health facilities could keep their doors open to serve the vast influx of patients affected by the disaster. With electric power down across the island, our support included supplying generators and water bladders to six health facilities, enabling them to restore electricity and provide clean drinking water at the health centers.

In total, International Medical Corps provided 2,361 hours of electrical power to health facilities, representing 290 days of operation across the island. We also provided small grants to 45 health centers to enable them to meet needs unique to their location, including purchasing and installing solar energy backups for cold-chain medical supplies and providing recovery cash grants to staff to ensure continuity in care. To reach remote communities, International Medical Corps deployed physicians and nurses alongside ASPPR staff, providing mobile clinical care in hard-to-reach areas and reaching around 1,000 people total.

International Medical Corps medical teams also worked to address underlying health needs exacerbated by the storm – namely, hygiene and nutritional care. We partnered with two local organizations—La Liga de La Leche and Alimentación Segura Infantil—to implement nutrition activities, including counseling on healthy breastfeeding and infant and young-child feeding practices for new and expecting mothers. Together, we reached 771 women with counseling and education while distributing 1,061 breastfeeding-support items.

## OVERALL RECOVERY PROGRAM

As Puerto Rico continues to rebuild from the devastating impacts of past hurricane seasons, International Medical Corps remains committed to recovery efforts. We are working with the Puerto Rico Department of Health (PRDoH) and ASPPR to deliver trainings on mental health and psychosocial support,



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

emergent infectious diseases and emergency preparedness. Throughout International Medical Corps' 35-year history, training has underpinned everything we do around the world. We continue to provide health personnel, local communities and community leaders of Puerto Rico with the tools, knowledge and skills needed to take their communities from relief to self-reliance.

## EMERGENCY PREPAREDNESS

International Medical Corps continues to partner with ASPPR to provide training, technical assistance and support to improve the quality of services offered by health clinics in Puerto Rico. Together, we are working to enable health centers to stay online after a disaster, helping to ensure uninterrupted care for vulnerable populations in crisis. Health personnel from 17 health clinics have benefited from our emergency preparedness training programs.





## MENTAL HEALTH AND PSYCHOSOCIAL SUPPORT (MHPSS)

During and after emergencies, people are more likely to suffer from a range of mental health problems. International Medical Corps is one of the few international relief organizations with the capacity to respond to and prioritize treatment of mental health needs in humanitarian crises. Following Puerto Rico's hurricanes, International Medical Corps completed an MHPSS needs assessment to identify existing services and evaluate the extent of mental health needs.

During the emergency phase, International Medical Corps found that local staff in Puerto Rico had limited training on how to provide MHPSS to distressed populations in post-disaster contexts. Subsequently, the Federal Emergency Management Agency, the PRDoH and government stakeholders in San Juan Municipality requested that International Medical Corps lead psychosocial support training. These training sessions teach mental health professionals and non-professionals how to provide compassionate emotional and practical support for people who have been exposed to a distressing event. To date, International Medical Corps has trained 246 individuals throughout Puerto Rico, including health staff and community members, in psychological first aid (PFA).





## AWARNESS RAISING

Using a community-based approach, International Medical Corps conducts awareness sessions focused on psychoeducation for emotional regulation, suicide prevention and crisis-coping skills, and supports referrals when higher levels of care are needed. To date, International Medical Corps has reached 121 individuals, including older adults, community leaders and youth. Sessions for older adults focus on stress management during and after disasters. Sessions for adolescents include therapeutic use of the arts, where participants create their own emotional management tools, such as “glitter jars” and preparedness kits with items to help them cope in times of disaster.

To address the lack of awareness around MHPSS in Puerto Rico, International Medical Corps also has run radio shows to augment our community-based outreach program. These half-hour shows disseminate information on stress reduction and increase

people’s awareness of accessible mental health services. They widened our reach and impact, supporting psychosocial support recovery efforts while preparing communities for the 2019 hurricane season by helping them know how to find support.

To date, International Medical Corps has conducted 19 radio shows, reaching approximately 2,841,000 people throughout seven regions. During the shows, experts discussed mental health concerns—including post-traumatic stress disorder and anxiety—as well as available options for care.

Following the radio shows, International Medical Corps received requests for additional PFA training from directors of hospitals and technical institutions for their health staff, along with requests from community members looking for additional information on available services. We are currently collaborating with the PRDoH and local health facilities to refer community members to the appropriate resources.



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

Since its inception 35 years ago, International Medical Corps’ mission has been consistent: ease the suffering of those affected by war, natural disaster and disease by delivering vital healthcare services and focusing on training that provides the skills and tools required to foster self-reliance. This approach of helping people to help themselves is critical to returning devastated populations to self-reliance.

September 2019

**COUNTRY CONTACT:** Karol Bassim, Program Director  
kbassim@InternationalMedicalCorps.org

**HEADQUARTERS CONTACT:** Susan Mangicaro,  
Senior Advisor in Emergency Response  
smangicaro@InternationalMedicalCorps.org

**HEADQUARTERS:** 12400 Wilshire Blvd., Suite 1500 | Los Angeles, CA 90025  
**PHONE:** 310-826-7800 | **Fax:** 310-442-6622

**DC OFFICE:** 1313 L St. NW, Suite 110 | Washington, DC 20005  
**PHONE:** 202-828-5155 | **Fax:** 202-828-5156

**UK OFFICE:** Ground Floor 161 Marsh Wall | London E14 9SJ  
**PHONE:** +44 (0) 207-253-0001