

“Let’s fight the virus together:” Resilience and Relationships in Cambodia EQHA’s COVID-19 Response

As the world battles the coronavirus disease (COVID-19), FHI 360, with financial support from the U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID), has been at the forefront of the global pandemic response. In Cambodia, the FHI 360-led, USAID-funded Enhancing Quality Healthcare Activity (EQHA) provided emergency response equipment to those on the ground.

On January 27, 2020, Cambodia reported its first COVID-19 case. By mid-February, the Ministry of Health (MOH) faced rapidly decreasing supplies of viral transport media (VTM, material designed to transport specimens for COVID-19 tests), as the Westerdam cruise ship docked at Sihanoukville and all VTM was allocated to the port city.

USAID solicited EQHA’s urgent assistance in procuring VTM for Cambodia. At the end of February, the EQHA team received USAID funds to spearhead the COVID-19 response and collaborated with FHI 360’s Bangkok office to deliver VTM to several health facilities throughout the country.

On March 20, EQHA delivered 2,000 units of VTM to the Cambodian MOH’s central medical store, a record-breaking time for overseas procurement. However, procurement did not occur without challenges. As Kosal and Thanaroth, members of FHI 360’s Bangkok procurement team, shared, “Vendors often [had limited] products due to high demand. We had to check with them hourly to receive the latest stock update.” Travel restrictions were another hurdle the team had to overcome. “Cold chain shipment was required for VTM, and there were limited cargo flights for shipping from Bangkok to Phnom Penh,” the procurement team members stated.

Nevertheless, FHI 360 staff persevered. “**Let’s fight the virus together,**” Chatchawal (JoJo) Sa-Nguansilp, FHI 360’s Senior Laboratory Specialist in Bangkok, stated in all of his emails to staff involved in the procurement process.

EQHA mounted a wide-reaching, community-based COVID-19 response across Cambodia that leveraged the power of resilience and relationships. The team sought local provincial health departments’ perspectives and learned that officials desperately needed personal protective equipment to protect health workers, as well as thermometers to screen migrants at the Cambodia-Thailand border.



FHI 360’s EQHA procurement team delivering 6,000 VTM units to the MOH’s central medical store in May 2020. *Photo credit: EQHA*



Handover of VTM to the Cambodia MOH by the EQHA team in the Central Medical Store in May 2020. Photo credit: EQHA

With support from the FHI 360 Bangkok laboratory team and the FHI 360 China procurement team, EQHA disseminated digital thermometers to the rapid response teams in provincial health departments of Banteay Meanchey, Battambang, Kampong Cham, Kampong Chhnang, Pailin, Phnom Penh, Pursat and Tbong Khmum provinces to allow health officials to provide triage to migrants with fever.

While challenges emerged, the team's united spirit fostered a solutions-oriented, systems-based approach. Within three months, EQHA's

procurement team, with its strong support network, was able to deliver 8,000 VTM units and 13,000 personal protective equipment sets to MOH, as well as computers and IT equipment to the Department of Infectious Diseases and Control to bolster contact tracing efforts.

A systems approach enabled EQHA to consider factors beyond infection prevention and control, with the team also administering video conference training and delivering distance-learning hub equipment for distance learning to 11 provincial hospitals, as well as the Department of Hospital Services.

HE Dr. Hok Kim Cheng, Director General for Health in Cambodia's MOH, acknowledged EQHA's efforts in the country's COVID-19 response. Cambodia detected a total of 156 cases, and had zero COVID-19-related deaths. With an absence of community-level transmission to date, Cambodia has demonstrated an effective rapid response to the COVID-19 pandemic, with EQHA's efficient procurement team playing a vital role in this success.