

LOCAL HEALTH SYSTEM SUSTAINABILITY PROJECT



CENTRAL ASIA

From the outset of the COVID-19 pandemic in early 2020, governments and donor agencies in Central Asia worked to assess the region's pandemic readiness and devise national response strategies. Authorities across the region identified a critical need for personal protective equipment, infection prevention and control materials, community containment strategies, stronger diagnostic networks and laboratory capacity, biosafety and biosecurity upgrades, routine and integrated epidemiological surveillance, and stronger hospital infrastructure, including but not limited to intensive care capacities. USAID engaged its flagship health system strengthening project, the Local Health System Sustainability Project (LHSS), to assist with response measures in these areas.

LHSS activities were co-designed with local stakeholders to fill needs or specific gaps in national strategic preparedness and response plans, with an emphasis on strengthening foundational health system elements to address COVID-19 while building stronger and more resilient health system capacities for future events. Throughout the region, LHSS coordinates with ministries of health and other organizations assisting in the effort, including the International Federation of the Red Crescent, the United Nations, the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, and the World Health Organization.

- In **Kazakhstan**, LHSS has worked with the Ministry of Health and other local authorities to identify and procure high-priority commodities. LHSS procurements evolved with the COVID-19 pandemic, initially focusing on materials for the safe collection and transportation of specimens, heavy equipment and reagents to increase microbiological analytic and research capacities, and materials to support intensive care. As variants of COVID-19 have emerged, LHSS has worked with USAID and CDC partners to procure equipment and reagents for genomic sequencing and other specialized laboratory techniques.
- In **Kyrgyzstan**, LHSS focuses on updating clinical protocols, improving laboratory services, strengthening the country's disease surveillance system, procuring hospital equipment for intensive care units, and strengthening the hospital oxygen ecosystem. We also collaborate with and strengthen Ministry of Health capacity to produce and disseminate trustworthy information about the pandemic and the efficacy of vaccines to nurses, doctors, and communities. This activity oversees strategic grants to two local civil society groups to address vaccine hesitancy and promote demand for equitable access to vaccines in remote areas with low uptake.



Laboratory technicians at the National Center of Expertise in Almaty with COVID-19 test kits provided by USAID. (Photo: Hazel Correa for USAID)

- In **Tajikistan**, LHSS has collaborated with the Ministry of Health and Social Protection of the Population to procure essential equipment such as RT-PCR testing equipment and lab supplies, train laboratory staff, and establish a new regional testing site to expand COVID-19 testing. Training has focused on advanced COVID-19 detection techniques, use of RT-PCR for microbiological threat detection, and lab biosafety and infection prevention and control. LHSS also works with partners to introduce genomic sequencing as part of broadening the country's microbiological research abilities. LHSS also led the nationwide cold chain inventory assessment, which was critical for determining proper vaccine storage capacity.
- In **Turkmenistan**, LHSS worked under the direction of the Ministry of Health to identify resources needed to support testing, identification, isolation, and care of people with COVID-19.
- In **Uzbekistan**, LHSS contributed to a multi-partner, government-led COVID-19 response. We procured over \$2 million in COVID-19 testing supplies, assisted with logistics and supply chain management, supported Ministry of Health epidemiologists, and assessed hospital readiness to receive USAID-donated ventilators. We also worked to strengthen the capacity of doctors and nurses to provide high-quality critical care for patients requiring ventilator support through the U.S. Government's global ventilator donation initiative.

LHSS planning, coordination, and consultation with partners in Central Asia and subsequent investments in procurement, training, and technical assistance have helped people obtain faster, higher quality COVID-19 tests and treatment.

In Kyrgyzstan and Uzbekistan, COVID-19 patients in intensive care units are receiving care with specialized medical equipment and oxygen concentrators. Laboratory technicians in Tajikistan are gaining new skills in advanced molecular testing techniques. Government partners in Kazakhstan are being strengthened with state-of-the-art diagnostic equipment and techniques.

Throughout the region, ministry of health decision makers are benefiting from expert input and support as they prioritize needs and strengthen their capacity to address the current pandemic while strengthening preparedness and response for future threats related to human health, animal health, and environmental protection.



Photo credit: Zamira Baydulloeva, LHSS Tajikistan

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