

Implementation of the EMT initiative in the Americas

May 2017





FIRST STEPS

The Americas rank second globally in terms of natural disasters. One quarter of the world's disasters have taken place in the Region of the Americas. Furthermore, 77% of the Region's health facilities are located in disaster-prone areas.

The countries of this Region have steadily improved their response to medium-scale emergencies and disasters using their own resources. However, the potential for major events makes good coordination mechanisms necessary to ensure a rapid response by national emergency medical teams, which may receive assistance from international teams, following accepted standards and procedures and respecting the culture and customs of the countries of our Region.

To guarantee this response, in 2003 the Pan American Health Organization sponsored a workshop in El Salvador to examine the use of field hospitals during disasters, subsequently approving the "Guidelines for the Use of Foreign Field Hospitals in the Aftermath of Sudden-Impact Disasters," which spelled out the basic procedures that should be followed by personnel and teams, as well as the critical points to analyze before deploying a hospital.

The analysis in the 2010 report "Health Response to the Earthquake of Haiti" demonstrated the need for adopting principles, criteria, and standards for the response of medical teams in emergencies and disasters in line with global efforts to improve humanitarian standards and procedures.

Based on this analysis, in December 2010, the Pan American Health Organization brought a group of experts together in Cuba to review, *inter alia*, the 2003 guidelines and optimize the procedures for requesting, accepting, and coordinating international medical teams, with the object of improving response time and efficiency in their deployment. This working group served as the basis for the initiative currently known as emergency medical teams (EMT).

Today, the ministries of health in the majority of countries in the Region of the Americas have permanent emergency and disaster programs in place. This important operational and knowledge-sharing network will undoubtedly facilitate development of the EMT initiative and its effective implementation as part of national and international responses.



MANDATE OF THE PAHO MEMBER STATES

In 1976, PAHO created the Emergency Preparedness and Disaster Relief Coordination Office, which since then, has worked to strengthen country capacity to deal with all manner of emergencies and improve the coordination of international health assistance in our Region.

In 1986, following the major disasters of the previous year (earthquake in Mexico and eruption of the Nevado del Ruiz volcano in Colombia), representatives of governments and international organizations in the Region met in Costa Rica to draft a Pan American policy to make health assistance in disasters more efficient. This regional policy was endorsed in Resolution CD32.R10 of the 32nd Directing Council, which emphasized the need to consult affected countries before sending health assistance and to prioritize cooperation among neighboring countries in the event medical personnel are needed. That same resolution requested the timely and authorized distribution of information among countries and organizations to ensure that the appropriate type of response is provided.

During the 28th Pan American Sanitary Conference, held in September 2012, the Member States adopted Resolution CSP28.R19, entitled “Coordination of International Humanitarian Assistance in Health in Case of Disasters,” which called on PASB to facilitate resource mobilization and the coordination of international health care to support affected countries, a flexible mechanism for the registry and accreditation of foreign rapid-response medical teams, and competency development for national teams.

Resolution CD52.R8 approved the Strategic Plan of the Pan American Health Organization 2014-2019 as the framework for strategic orientation and resource coordination and mobilization to reduce death and disease from emergencies and disasters.

The 53rd Directing Council of PAHO, comprised of delegates from the Member States, approved the “Plan of Action for the Coordination of Humanitarian Assistance” in the Americas, which calls for implementation of response procedures and flexible national mechanisms for the registration of emergency medical teams in the Member States. Furthermore, the 55th Directing Council approved the “Plan of Action for Disaster Risk Reduction 2016-2021,” which calls for strengthening the countries’ capacity to develop their own national teams and updating the knowledge and procedures of emergency and disaster response teams.



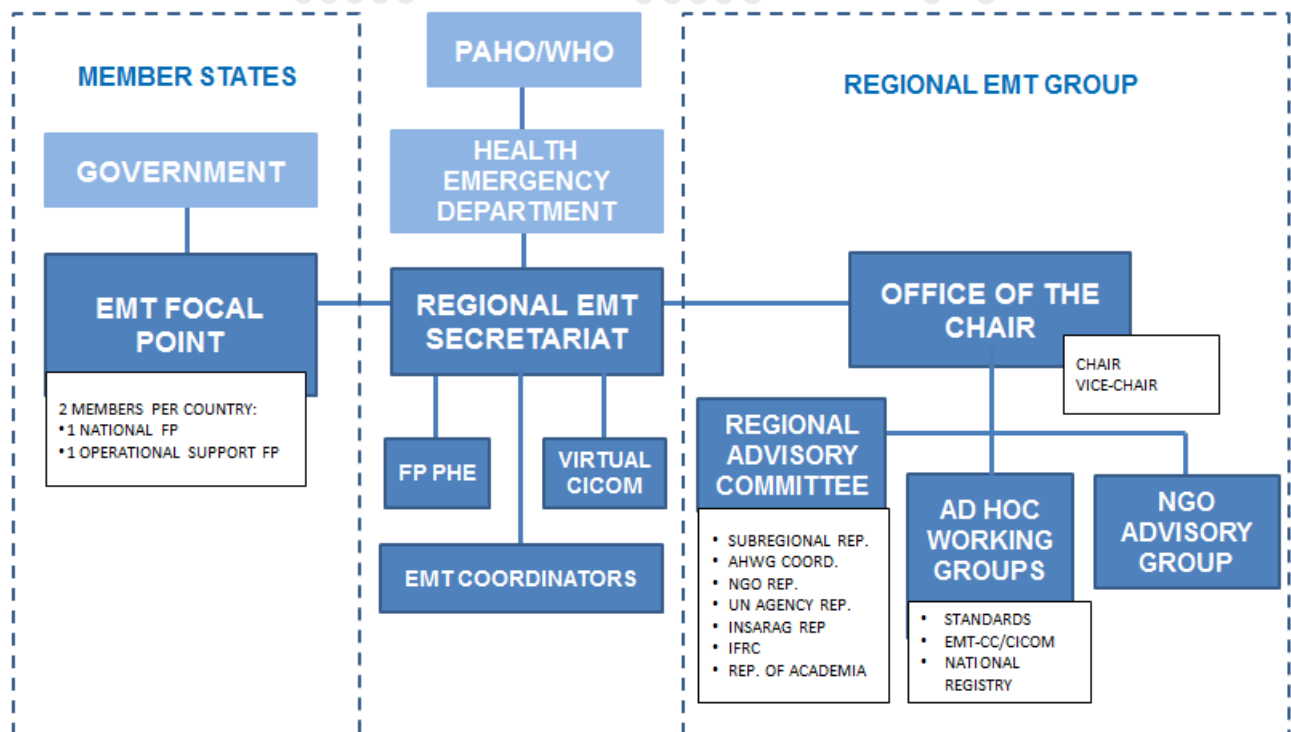
ARCHITECTURE OF EMT IMPLEMENTATION IN THE AMERICAS.

The global EMT initiative is implemented through the Global Secretariat and its three Regional Secretariats for Africa/Europe/Middle East, Asia/Pacific, and the Americas.

The Global Secretariat will hold meetings every two years, and the regional secretariats in intervening years.



The EMT initiative in the Americas will be implemented through the Pan American Health Organization and will be comprised of the Regional EMT Secretariat, the Regional EMT Group, and the national EMT focal point network.





The Regional EMT Secretariat is under the Department of Health Emergencies (PHE) of PAHO/WHO, which is mandated to provide technical assistance to strengthen the Member States' emergency health response capacity.

The Secretariat is also charged with managing and maintaining the regional roster of EMT coordinators and the Virtual CICOM¹/EMTCC tool.

Its work is supported by the network of PHE focal points in each PAHO/WHO Representative Office.

The regional EMT group is the Secretariat's advisory body for the EMT initiative's implementation plan in the Region. It is headed by a Chair and at least one incoming Vice-Chair, appointed under a rotation system. It is made up of:

- A regional advisory committee, consisting of a representative from each subregion, the coordinator of each active working group, the representative of the NGO group, a representative of the United Nations system, a representative of the regional INSARAG group, and a representative of the International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies (IFRC), and a representative of academia.
- An NGO advisory group, consisting of a coordinator and the representatives/heads of the main NGOs with experience in EMT development and response in the Region.
- Working groups, created to examine topics of specific interest to the Region. There are currently groups on standards, EMT-CC/CICOM, and national registration mechanisms.

The Secretariat will also have the support of a network of focal points. Focal points are appointed by the national authorities of each PAHO Member State to share information and experiences with the implementation of the EMT initiative at the institutional and operational level.

FUNCTIONS

Regional EMT Secretariat

- Establish the strategy and plan of action for implementing the EMT initiative in the Region, in line with the current resolutions of the PAHO Directing Council.
- Provide technical assistance for national implementation of the EMT initiative and the creation of emergency medical teams.
- Gather and disseminate information about the EMT initiative to Member States and regional organizations.

¹ CICOM is the Spanish acronym for the Medical Coordination and Information Cell also known as EMT CC in other regions



- Keep the regional roster of EMT coordinators and the Virtual CICOM (EMTCC) platform operational.
- Support the Office of the Chair in creating and developing the working groups of the regional EMT group, keeping the network of focal points and the regional group apprised of the progress of its work.
- Hold workshops, events, and regional simulations as part of the EMT initiative.
- Hold the annual EMT meeting of the Region of the Americas jointly with the regional group.
- Maintain a schedule of meetings and regional events.
- Keep the membership roster of the regional group and the EMT focal points network up to date.
- Maintain communication with the Global Secretariat and the other regions.

EMT Coordinators

- At the request of the affected country, deploy in emergencies to assist with the coordination of emergency medical teams.
- Assist PAHO's EOC and the national CICOM/EMT-CC with information management and the coordination of EMTs
- Participate in missions to assess EMT capabilities in the countries of the Region
- Participate in the regional training activities of the EMT initiative
- Support national implementation of the EMT initiative in their respective countries
- Assist with the review of the documents prepared by the working groups

Focal points of the PAHO Department of Health Emergencies (FP-PHE)

- Assist the Secretariat with its functions at the national level
- Increase contact with the national and operational EMT focal points of their respective countries.

Virtual CICOM (EMTCC)

- Manage online information on requests, offers, and the deployment of emergency medical teams in emergencies or disasters affecting the Region.

Chair of the Regional EMT Group

- Promote the EMT initiative and standards in the countries and regional organizations of the American Hemisphere.
- Serve as the host and co-organizer (planning, logistical arrangements) and, if possible, cover the organizing costs of the regional EMT meeting together with the regional secretariat and the office of the Vice-Chair.
- Support and advise the Secretariat on regional implementation of the EMT initiative, in line with the current resolutions of the PAHO Directing Council.
- With the secretariat, represent the regional EMT group at important meetings and events.



Vice-Chair Regional EMT Group

- Promote the EMT initiative and standards in the countries and regional organizations of the Americas.
- Assist the Chair and the regional secretariat with the co-organization of the regional EMT meeting.
- Support and advise the secretariat and the Chair on regional implementation of the EMT initiative, in line with the resolutions of the PAHO Directing Council currently in force.
- In coordination with the Chair, represent the regional EMT group and the secretariat at important meetings and events.

Regional advisory committee

- Assist the Chair in developing the functions of the Regional EMT Group for the Americas.
- Support planning and development of the regional EMT meeting, as necessary.
- Suggest action and activities for implementing the EMT initiative.
- Offer recommendations to the Office of the Chair and the Regional Secretariat for developing EMT standards.

NGO advisory group

- Share and examine good practices, technical concepts, and operational issues in EMT development and response to improve the initiative at the regional level.
- Keep the map of leaders and NGO EMT capabilities up to date.
- Participate and collaborate in the regional events and activities of the EMT initiative.

Special working groups

- Discuss and devise solutions for specific problems with EMT implementation in the Region of the Americas.
- Assist global working groups with the submission of regional proposals.
- Prepare and develop technical notes, training packages, and simulation exercises for regional EMTs.
- Keep the Regional EMT Secretariat apprised of the progress of their work.

National EMT focal points

- Ensure efficient information sharing with relevant EMT actors at the national level.
- Ensure the development of tools, regulations, and policies for sending, receiving, and deploying EMTs in their country, in line with the guiding principles and basic standards of the global initiative and implementation in the Region.
- Promote the implementation of CICOM in national and local coordination mechanisms
- Serve as the country's point of contact with the Secretariat for institutional issues related to implementation of the EMT initiative.



- Describe their country's capacity to send and receive EMTs.
- Ensure their country's representation at regional meetings on EMTs.
- Share the information provided by the Regional Secretariat on meetings, workshops, and simulations with the national level.

National EMT operational focal points

- Assist the national focal point with operational issues connected with the EMT response.
- Ensure efficient information sharing and the updating of operating procedures with national EMTs.
- Help the national focal point develop the plan of action for CICOM implementation.
- Promote the strengthening of national EMT capacities, in line with the basic requirements established in the global EMT initiative and implementation in the Region.
- Serve as the country's main point of contact with the Secretariat for operational issues related to implementation of the EMT initiative.
- Update the map of available national EMTs in the country.

MEMBERSHIP

Membership in the regional EMT group and network of EMT focal points is open to all Member States of the Region and the organizations involved in the EMT response and must be recommended and approved by the respective national health authorities or national emergency and disaster risk management units.

The regional group is headed by a Chair and a maximum of two Vice-Chairs, appointed through a rotation system. The first Vice-Chair presides over the group when the Chair's term ends. A second Vice-Chair would succeed the first Vice-Chair. The Chair serves for one year. The Secretariat will annually call on the Member States to fill the vacancies.

The designation of EMT focal points is at the discretion of the health and disaster management authorities, depending on the country's administrative structure. Health authorities in the Member States should inform the regional secretariat about the designation of their EMT focal points through the respective PAHO Representative Offices and update the information when focal points are replaced.

It is advisable for the national EMT focal point to be a health official with experience in international cooperation or an official of the organization charged with disaster management who can provide institutional support for the development and implementation of the EMT initiative in the country.

Operational focal points should be specialists in EMT technical management and leadership. It is recommended that they have training and experience in EMT response.



Each working group will have a coordinator and sufficient experts from the Region to ensure a complete regional perspective on the matter to be addressed. Experts from the Region may also participate in the global working group and even transfer those debates to this Region as an ad hoc working group to facilitate the regional contribution to global discussions.

Participation in the regional advisory committee will be by invitation through the Secretariat.

Leaders of the emergency medical teams of nongovernmental organizations in the Region are invited to join the NGO advisory group. Participants must be approved by the organization's director or senior administrator. The members of this group shall designate a member to represent them in the regional advisory committee and at meetings of the Regional Group.

The Secretariat may invite experts from the Region with the experience and qualifications to discuss the topic of interest to the working group. To this end, it will establish terms of reference for selecting members of the working groups and provide technical orientation and timetables for the delivery of results.

THE COUNTRIES' ROLE IN IMPLEMENTING THE EMT INITIATIVE.

The countries of the Americas are expected to conduct the following activities for national implementation of the initiative:

- actively participate in the EMT Regional Group of the Americas.
- update their national standards and procedures for requesting, accepting, and receiving emergency medical teams.
- promote the classification of national EMTs
- develop a national mechanism for the registry of national and international emergency medical teams.
- develop information management and EMT coordination tools based on the EMT-CC/CICOM model.
- share experiences and good EMT practices with the rest of countries of the Region.