

PANAMA

Initiative for the Elimination of Trachoma in the Americas

A platform to bring comprehensive health care to the most vulnerable communities

Panama participates in the Initiative for the Elimination of Trachoma in the Americas

Panama joined the Initiative for the elimination of trachoma in the Americas in 2025 with the goal of generating evidence to determine whether or not this disease constitutes a public health problem in the country. It plans to conduct a baseline trachoma survey in the Ngäbe-Buglé region, a mountainous area on the border with Costa Rica, and in the Emberá Wounaan/Darien Province region, on the border with Colombia.

These areas have been prioritized owing to the living conditions there. The majority of the population is Indigenous and experiences high levels of poverty affecting up to 89% of the population, limited access to safe water and sanitation (less than 40%), and geographic barriers that hinder access to health services. Due to this combination of factors, trachoma is suspected to be present in Panama. Data collection is needed to determine whether trachoma is a public health problem in the country.

Ocular trachoma is the leading infectious cause of blindness worldwide. In the Americas, Mexico eliminated the disease as a public health problem in 2017, followed by El Salvador in July 2026. Guatemala and Paraguay are the countries closest to achieving validation of the elimination of the disease, which remains a public health problem in Brazil, Colombia, and Peru. Other countries, such as Bolivia and Venezuela, have communities that may require interventions. Meanwhile, the disease is suspected to be present in Ecuador, Guyana, and Panama. It is important to implement surveillance measures in these countries to confirm whether or not the disease is a public health problem.

A partnership between the Pan American Health Organization (PAHO) and the Government of Canada aims not only to eliminate trachoma but also, through the integration of activities, to strengthen primary healthcare services in the most vulnerable communities, build the capacity of Ministry of Health workers in the 12 participating countries, and demonstrate the value of international cooperation in achieving more resilient health systems and a better future for all.

What are Panama's main advances toward the elimination of trachoma?

The Ministry of Health of Panama, together with PAHO and with funding from the Government of Canada, has begun **technical, logistical, and operational planning for a “trachoma plus” survey** aligned with international standards. These studies include three components: clinical examination for trachoma, polymerase chain reaction (PCR) testing of ocular samples, and serological testing to identify evidence of past transmission. The results will help determine whether trachoma is a public health problem.

During the initial survey planning process, the country has incorporated a **comprehensive health approach** (including indicators of visual health, soil-transmitted helminth infections, and serological testing for other diseases of public health interest), as well as **equity, gender, and intercultural** perspectives and **intersectoral coordination**.



What key actions will Panama take to accelerate the validation of trachoma elimination?

Panama will implement a **baseline trachoma “plus” prevalence survey** in the regions of Ngäbe-Buglé and Emberá Wounaan/Darien Province.

These surveillance activities will be preceded by efforts to **strengthen the capacity of local health workers** through training on the different components of the survey, in accordance with international standards and using multidisciplinary teams. The inclusion of local workers is part of a strategy aimed at facilitating an intercultural approach and improving acceptance and communication with Indigenous communities.

Additionally, to **optimize resources and strengthen integrated approaches**, the opportunity provided by entering these remote and hard-to-reach communities will be used to address other health problems, such as Chagas disease, and other neglected skin diseases.

Intersectoral coordination with the Ministry of the Environment and the Ministry of Social Development will also be promoted to analyze the determinants of health (water, sanitation, hygiene, and living conditions) and strengthen public policies aimed at health equity.

This Initiative is aligned with PAHO's efforts to eliminate more than 30 diseases and related conditions by 2030, through an integrated and sustainable approach that promotes collaboration across sectors and within health systems.



For more information, see:
<https://www.paho.org/en/topics/trachoma>