

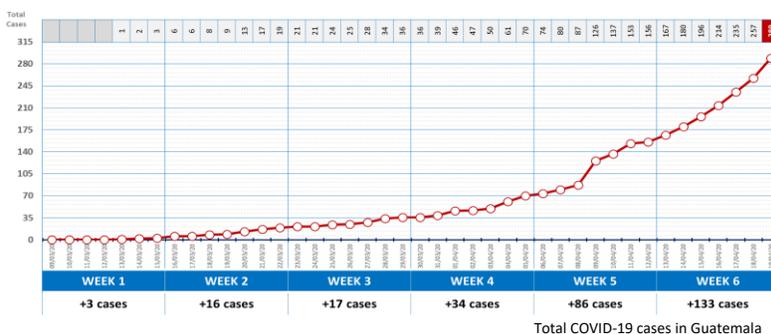
Guatemala united against COVID-19

The private sector has a clear response to support the Government

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In a country with such a fragile health and institutional system like Guatemala, most sectors began to panic as COVID-19 first cases began to appear in the country. Looking at the horrible images of Europe, especially Italy¹ and Spain, the horrific scenarios for our country were grim. The idea of having dead people piling up, like they did in Ecuador’s capital – Guayaquil² was something that no one wanted and President Giammattei was swift to implement social distance measures and early lockdowns, to prevent the spread of the virus.

As of April 19, Guatemala had 289 cases of COVID-19, 73.4% of cases are between 21 and 50 years old and 60.21% of cases are in the departments of Guatemala, Chimaltenango and Sacatepequez.



On March 13th, the Government declared a State of Calamity. Through April 26, unessential activities in the private and public sectors are suspended, all national borders are closed, all travel between departments in the province towards the department of Guatemala and from Guatemala to the provinces are prohibited and a curfew (6pm until 4am) is in force.

The private sector through FUNDESA (Foundation for the Development of Guatemala), a private nonprofit organization that works on public policies³, has been coordinating with the Government of Guatemala to increase the capacity of the Health Ministry and public hospitals. During the past four years FUNDESA has been implementing a project that has increased savings and efficiency of public hospitals by 25% and has had the capacity to increase the availability of medicines from 35% to 65% in all public hospitals, by supporting technical training and capacity building on procurement and inventory controls.

¹ <https://edition.cnn.com/2020/03/19/europe/italy-death-toll-intl/index.html>

² <https://www.nytimes.com/2020/04/14/world/americas/coronavirus-Ecuador-guayaquil.html>

³ <http://fundesa.org.gt/>

As a result of this effort, FUNDESA generated a specific commission to work together with Del Valle University⁴, to not only advise the Ministry of Health on specific additional recommendations on how to address the public policies that the Government had to implement (like the mandatory use of masks in public places) and how to increase tests.

In doing so, FUNDESA launched a national campaign⁵ to receive donations in order to purchase Real-time reverse transcription polymerase chain tests (rRT-PCR)⁶ from Korea, USA and France, as international demand has made these tests scarce.

Through more than 150 donations of private companies, people from the business community and private individuals, FUNDESA collected US\$1.5 million dollars, that are now being used to purchase rRT-PCR tests, swabs, reactors, protective medical equipment, respirators and other medical supplies for the public hospitals.

This public-private effort coordinated by FUNDESA and the technical capacity of the del Valle University is now supporting not only the Health Ministry but the Guatemalan Social Security Institute (IGSS)⁷ to increase the capacity and knowledge about the different rRT-PCR tests available and how to scaleup these purchases with the support of UNOPS⁸.

The effort of FUNDESA of coordinating with different organizations to support the Government of Guatemala, has led to the donation of 6,960 initial rRT-PCR tests as well as reactor supplies and more than 20,000 rRT-PCR tests will be purchased in the following weeks. Test capacity in the country has increased from 25 to 300 daily tests. Epidemiology experts of the Del Valle University estimate that we must prepare for 10,000 cases by the end of May (because of undetected cases) so minimum capacity required must increase to at least 1,500 tests per day. We will continue to accompany our authorities to incorporate skills and technical assistance, at the political and institutional level, from successful experiences from around the world.

FUNDESA is also working very close with CACIF (the Guatemalan umbrella organization of the private sector) and the Ministry of Economy, on implementing a Back to Work strategy. This will require more rRT-PCR tests, as well as serological testing, to find out how large a proportion of the population have had the infection and developed antibodies to it.

⁴ <https://www.uvg.edu.gt/>

⁵ <https://twitter.com/FUNDESA/status/1243953307518992384?s=20>

⁶ <https://www.fda.gov/media/136151/download>

⁷ <https://www.igssgt.org/>

⁸ <https://www.unops.org/>