

Background

The capacity of a Government and Ministry of Health to detect and respond to health emergencies and outbreaks, and to call upon appropriate international assistance in a timely manner, is key component of a strong health system and a pillar of the International Health Regulations (IHR).

The Pacific is at particularly high risk of sudden onset disasters (Cyclones, Volcanoes, Earthquakes, Tsunamis and floods, among others) with some risks now heightened due to climate change. The region has faced outbreaks in the past and continues to be at risk from emerging disease threats, most particularly COVID-19. Health emergencies with the potential to require national Emergency Medical Teams and other public health rapid response teams will continue to affect Pacific Island countries (PIC). Occasionally even a well-prepared country will also require surge support from International EMTs and requires mechanisms to call for appropriate support.

Through support from the Governments of Australia, New Zealand and the United States, WHO has been able to assist the Governments and Ministries of Health of Pacific Island Countries and Areas in:

- Planning the development of and establishing national EMTs capable of immediate response to outbreaks and natural disasters in the Pacific
- Providing team member trainings and full-scale simulation exercises to develop pools of deployment-ready national health responders.
- Developing/strengthening the national EMT systems to be able to deploy clinical and public health teams when required in cases of emergencies or outbreaks.
- Developing the SOPs and policies for the deployment of national teams as well as for the rapid assessment of gaps in order to request, accept and task international teams and experts arriving to assist the health response.



Pacific EMT Summary Table

Country/Area	Team Name	National/ International	SSA/ Focal Point	Team Member Trainings Completed	Notes
Fiji	FEMAT	International	SSA under recruitment		Verified international type 1 team
French Polynesia		National	Not appointed		Initial planning stages
Kiribati		National	SSA in place		Initial planning stages
CNMI		National/USAPIs	Focal Point appointed		Focus on local response, but potential for USAPI deployments
RMI		National			Initial planning stages
FSM		National			Planning teams in every State
Palau		National			Initial planning stages
Samoa					
Solomon Islands	SOLMAT				Team trained and deployed nationally
Tonga	TEMAT	National			Team trained and supporting COVID
Tuvalu					Initial planning stages
Vanuatu	VANMAT				Team trained and deployed nationally

2019 Major Accomplishments

- 18 international EMTs, including several Pacific teams (Fiji/UNFPA, French Polynesia, Kiribati and Solomon Islands) deployed to Samoa to support the measles outbreak response, working hand-in-hand with Samoan clinicians to control the outbreak, vaccinate tens of thousands of Samoans, and care for **XXX patients**.
- Fiji Emergency Medical Assistance Team (FEMAT) verified/classified as an International Type 1 Fixed EMT – the first verified international EMT in the Pacific.
- Multi-year funding secured from Australia, New Zealand and the United States to support national EMT development in 12 PICs (the Cook Islands, Fiji, Kiribati, the Commonwealth of the Northern Mariana Island, the Republic of the Marshall Islands, the Federated States of Micronesia, Palau, Samoa, the Solomon Islands, Tonga, Tuvalu and Vanuatu).
- Team Member Training and simulation exercises for national EMTs delivered in the Cook Islands, the CNMI the Solomon Islands, Tonga and Vanuatu. An EMT orientation workshop was held in

FSM in late 2019, and this was followed up with an SOP workshop in Pohnpei in January 2020. One new EMT SSA was recruited in Kiribati and started work in May 2020.

- Dedicated National EMT Focal Points operational in Fiji, CNMI, FSM, the Solomon Islands, Tonga and Vanuatu.

EMTs in the Pacific in the Context of COVID-19

National EMT development in the Pacific has largely been put on hold throughout 2020 due to measles and then COVID-19 outbreaks. Nevertheless, national EMTs have contributed substantially to preparedness and response efforts in the Pacific:

- In Fiji, FEMAT has had an instrumental role in COVID-19 preparedness and response. FEMAT Technical Members have been assigned key roles to manage Fiji's COVID-19 Incident Management Team.. The FEMAT Field hospital was initially setup to provide surge support and later smaller tents were built by FEMAT in various hospitals to support COVID-19 response. FEMAT was also deployed during COVID-19 pandemic after Tropical Cyclone Harold and served the Eastern Division with health response. FEMAT has re-develop infection control protocols and is continuing to build its assets while working on preparedness for large scale surge response.
- In the Solomon Islands...
- Tonga Emergency Medical Assistance Team (TEMAT) members have conducted training for healthcare workers/frontliners in all islands in Tonga, supported the developing of the National Action Plan for COVID-19 Preparedness and Response, and supported operationalization of quarantine facility for repatriated Tongans
- In Vanuatu...

2020-2021 Priorities

- a. Support Pacific national Emergency Medical Teams (EMTs) through EMT orientation workshops (target: 1 in 2020), team member trainings (target: 2 in 2020), refresher trainings/simulation exercises with existing teams (target: 1 in 2020), support for EMT standard operating procedure (SOP) development and coordinating mentor/technical support to Pacific EMTs. Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, orientation workshops and truncated training workshops/exercises may be conducted virtually through video teleconference.
- b. Contribute to EMT governance and collaboration in the Western Pacific region and globally through coordination with the WPR EMT Chair and Vice-Chairs and by supporting their engagement with global and regional coordination structures, such as the EMT Strategic Advisory Group. A planned WPR Regional EMT meeting will be held virtually by video teleconference in 2020.
- c. Plan and implement at least one EMT Coordination Cell (EMT-CC) training in the Region in 2020 (Q3) - conducted virtually through video teleconference, with a view to conducting an in-person full-scale training when possible.