

## TECHNICAL NOTE. ADAPTING THE FIRST LEVEL OF CARE IN THE CONTEXT OF THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC: INTERVENTIONS, MODALITIES, AND SCOPE

## 23 April 2020

This Note<sup>a</sup> elaborates on Recommendation 1 of the document on the Reorganization and Expansion of Health Services<sup>b</sup> as a frame of reference for reorganizing services at the first level of care and progressively structuring priority programs, as well as the set of activities that each country will identify as essential to ensure continuity of care for individuals, families, and communities during sustained community transmission of COVID-19 and in the context of each country. The continuity of essential services during the pandemic involves: suspending some routine activities at the first level of care; implementing other ways of providing services; strengthening first-level-of-care response capacity to effectively provide services such as 24-hour emergency services, day care centers, ambulatory surgery, delivery care, medication dispensing, and blood collection; relocating specialized personnel at the first level of care; strengthening teams with personnel to manage COVID-19 cases and contacts in the community; establishing separated physical areas for management of patients with respiratory symptoms; and using telemedicine and tele-messaging, among other measures. As the pandemic progresses, this should lead to the adaptation of guidelines, recommendations, and guidance on how the first level of care can ensure the continuity of priority programs and care for populations in conditions of vulnerability in the current circumstances.

Infection control standards and recommendations, as well as health protection standards for workers at the first level of care and for the use of personal protective equipment,<sup>c</sup> must be applied in all interventions, modalities, and settings.

**Purpose:** The purpose of this technical note is to identify first-level-of-care interventions, activities, modalities, and scopes in the context of integrated health service delivery networks (IHSDN), for adaptation in response to sustained community transmission of the COVID-19 pandemic.<sup>d</sup>

Audience: The document is targeted at health services managers, administrators, and coordinators at the first level of care.

Functions: During the period of sustained community transmission, the first level of care has three functions:

- 1. Services focused on the response to COVID-19: identify, report, contain, manage, and refer.
- 2. Maintaining continuity of essential services during community transmission of COVID-19.
- Reducing the demand on hospitals to increase the capacity of hospital-based services in response to COVID-19

The following three tables describe the components involved in each function.

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<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>b</sup> Reorganization and Progressive Expansion of Health Services for the Response to the COVID-19 Pandemic. Technical Working Document. March 2020. PAHO/WHO. <a href="https://www.paho.org/en/documents/reorganization-and-progressive-expansion-health-services-response-covid-19-pandemic">https://www.paho.org/en/documents/reorganization-and-progressive-expansion-health-services-response-covid-19-pandemic</a>

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>c</sup> Rational use of personal protective equipment for coronavirus disease (COVID-19) and considerations during severe shortages. Interim guidance, 6 April 2020 <a href="https://apps.who.int/iris/bitstream/handle/10665/331695/WHO-2019-nCov-IPC">https://apps.who.int/iris/bitstream/handle/10665/331695/WHO-2019-nCov-IPC</a> PPE use-2020.3-eng.pdf

List of Priority Medical Devices in the context of COVID-19 (provisional recommendations, 6 April 2020) 3rd Version

<a href="https://www.paho.org/en/documents/technical-specifications-medical-devices-case-management-covid-19-healthcare-settings">https://www.paho.org/en/documents/technical-specifications-medical-devices-case-management-covid-19-healthcare-settings</a>

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>d</sup> Response to COVID-19 has to be adapted to different national and local epidemiological situations, so that information collected in countries, territories, and areas is up-to-date and accessible to decision-makers during the response, and in particular, for the adaptation of the first level of care.

Services focused on the response to COVID-19: *identify, report, contain, manage, and refer*<sup>1</sup> (contribute to identification of cases, containment of expansion, and timely management of all ambulatory COVID-19 cases in the community)

INTERVENTION	ACTIVITIES	MODALITIES	SETTING®	SUPPORTING REFERENCES
1. Identify and report cases and contacts	<ul> <li>Support for case tracing and early detection.</li> <li>Identification and monitoring of older adults:<sup>2</sup> cases, and contacts.</li> <li>Pre-triage<sup>3</sup> and triage<sup>4</sup> of respiratory patients</li> <li>Diagnosis of individuals with COVID-19, following clinical suspicion, according to national protocols for diagnostic testing</li> </ul>	<ul> <li>Activation of community networks.</li> <li>Individual care at first level-of-care centers.</li> <li>Domiciliary care<sup>5</sup> or in isolation centers for COVID-19 patients requiring isolation.</li> <li>Telemedicine<sup>6</sup></li> <li>Telephone calls</li> <li>Telemessaging</li> </ul>	Individual Family Community	Initial care of persons with acute respiratory illness (ARI) in the context of coronavirus disease (COVID-19) in healthcare facilities: assess the risk, isolate, refer. interim recommendations, version 1 – 13 Abril 2020. PAHO/WHO. <a href="https://www.paho.org/en/documents/initial-care-persons-acute-respiratory-illness-ari-context-coronavirus-disease-covid-19">https://www.paho.org/en/documents/initial-care-persons-acute-respiratory-illness-ari-context-coronavirus-disease-covid-19</a> Infection prevention and control guidance for long-term care facilities in the context of COVID-19: interim guidance, 21 March 2020. PAHO/WHO. <a href="https://apps.who.int/iris/bitstream/handle/10665/331508/WHO-2019-nCoV-IPC long term care-2020.1-eng.pdf?sequence=1&amp;isAllowed=y">https://apps.who.int/iris/bitstream/handle/10665/331508/WHO-2019-nCoV-IPC long term care-2020.1-eng.pdf?sequence=1&amp;isAllowed=y</a> *Reorganization and Progressive Expansion of Health Services for the Response to the COVID-19 Pandemic. Annex 1. Technical Working Document. March 2020. PAHO/WHO. <a href="https://www.paho.org/en/documents/respiratory-symptoms-pandemic">https://www.paho.org/en/documents/respiratory-symptoms</a> . Pathor care for patients with COVID-19 presenting with mild symptoms and management of their contacts. Interim guidance. 17 March 2020. PAHO/WHO. <a href="https://www.who.int/publications-detail/home-care-for-patients-with-suspected-novel-coronavirus-(ncov)-infection-presenting-with-mild-symptoms-and-management-of-contacts">https://www.who.int/publications-detail/home-care-for-patients-with-suspected-novel-coronavirus-(ncov)-infection-presenting-with-mild-symptoms-and-management-of-contacts</a> *Reorganization and Progressive Expansion of Health Services for the Response to the COVID-19 Pandemic. Annex 3. Technical Working Document. March 2020. PAHO/WHO. (op.cit.)
2. Containing the expansion	■ Support for isolation of cases and contacts, quarantine, and social distancing. ■ Communication of and guidance on and guidance on tealth measures (cough hygiene, hand hygiene, social distancing, early isolation of patients with respiratory symptoms)	<ul> <li>Activation of community networks</li> <li>Telemessaging</li> <li>Mobile broadcasting</li> <li>Intersectoral support</li> </ul>	Individual Family Community	<sup>7</sup> Considerations for quarantine of individuals in the context of containment for coronavirus disease (COVID-19). Interim guidance, 19 March 2020. PAHO/WHO. <a href="https://www.who.int/publications-detail/considerations-for-quarantine-of-individuals-in-the-context-of-containment-for-coronavirus-disease-(covid-19)">https://www.who.int/publications-for-quarantine-of-individuals-in-the-context-of-containment-for-coronavirus-disease-(covid-19)</a> <sup>8</sup> Risk Communication and Community Engagement (RCCE) Action Plan Guidance: COVID-19 Preparedness and Response. 16 March 2020. PAHO/WHO <a covid-19-communication-materials"="" en="" href="https://www.who.int/publications-detail/risk-communication-and-community-engagement-(rcce)-action-plan-guidance&lt;/a&gt; &lt;sup&gt;9&lt;/sup&gt;COVID-19 Communication Materials. Infographics. PAHO/WHO. &lt;a href=" https:="" www.paho.org="">https://www.paho.org/en/covid-19-communication-materials</a> <a href="https://www.paho.org/en/documents/covid-19-guidelines-communicating-about-coronavirus-disease-2019-guideleaders">https://www.paho.org/en/documents/covid-19-guidelines-communicating-about-coronavirus-disease-2019-guideleaders</a> <a href="https://www.paho.org/en/documents/covid-19-guidelines-communicating-about-coronavirus-disease-2019-guideleaders">https://www.paho.org/en/documents/covid-19-guidelines-communicating-about-coronavirus-disease-2019-guideleaders</a> <a href="https://www.paho.org/en/documents/covid-19-guidelines-communicating-about-coronavirus-disease-2019-guideleaders">https://www.paho.org/en/documents/covid-19-guidelines-communicating-about-coronavirus-disease-2019-guideleaders</a> <a href="https://www.who.int/docs/default-source/coronaviruse/getting-workplace-ready-for-covid-19.pdf">https://www.who.int/docs/default-source/coronaviruse/getting-workplace-ready-for-covid-19.pdf</a>
3. Manage	Ensure domiciliary treatment, care, and monitoring of individuals with mild COVID-19 symptoms in isolation, 12 with special attention to the prevention of transmission in the	Care at home or in isolation centers for COVID-19 patients in isolation Telemedicine Telephone calls Intersectoral support	Individual Family Community	<ul> <li>12Home care for patients with COVID-19 presenting with mild symptoms and management of their contacts. Interim guidance. 17 March 2020. Publication. PAHO/WHO. Op Cit.</li> <li>13Advice on the use of masks in the context of COVID-19. Interim guidance. 6 April 2020. PAHO/WHO. <a href="https://apps.who.int/iris/handle/10665/331693">https://apps.who.int/iris/handle/10665/331693</a></li> <li>14Social Stigma associated with COVID-19: A guide to preventing and addressing social stigma. Updated 24 February 2020. IFRC, UNICEF, WHO. <a href="https://www.unicef.org/media/65931/file/Social%20stigma%20associated%20with%20the%20coronavirus%20disease%202019%20(COVID-19).pdf">https://www.unicef.org/media/65931/file/Social%20stigma%20associated%20with%20the%20coronavirus%20disease%202019%20(COVID-19).pdf</a></li> </ul>

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<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>e</sup> For purposes of this technical note, the term **Setting** refers to the targeted subject and space in the intervention at the first level of care.

home <sup>13</sup> and social stigma <sup>14</sup> Care of convalescent COVID-19 patients.  Provision, when necessary, of drugs and devices for management of symptoms and isolation.  Promotion of special measures			
drugs and devices for management of symptoms and isolation.  Promotion of	In-person care     at first level-of-     care centers.     Domiciliary care	Individual	
risk factors to the hospital level.	or care at isolation centers for COVID-19 cases.  Telemedicine Telephone call		

Maintaining continuity of essential services during the community transmission stage of the pandemic.<sup>f</sup> (Maintain the operational capacity of the first level of care to prevent deterioration in care for other health priorities)

INTERVENTION	ACTIVITIES	MODALITIES	SCOPE	SUPPORTING REFERENCES
1. Persons with disabilities, 15 chronic conditions 16 (STIs, diabetes, COPD, etc.), and patients with communicable diseases (tuberculosis, 17 malaria, HIV, 18 and others)	<ul> <li>Domiciliary monitoring and follow-up of highrisk groups.</li> <li>Immunizations 19,20</li> <li>Referral to specialized services</li> <li>Sampling for laboratory tests.</li> <li>Prescribe and dispense medications for longer periods.</li> </ul>	<ul> <li>Activation of community networks</li> <li>Caregiver care</li> <li>Care at home or in isolation centers for COVID-19 patients in isolation</li> <li>Telemedicine</li> <li>Telephone calls</li> </ul>	Individual Family Community	15Disability considerations during the COVID-19 outbreak, PAHO/WHO. https://www.paho.org/en/documents/disability-considerations-during-covid-19-outbreak 16Information note on COVID-19 and noncommunicable diseases. PAHO/WHO. https://www.paho.org/en/documents/information-note-covid-19-and-noncommunicable-diseases 17Information Note Tuberculosis and COVID-19 (March 19, 2020). PAHO/WHO. https://www.paho.org/en/documents/information-note-tuberculosis-and-covid-19-march-19-2020 18Coronavirus Disease 2019 (COVID-19) and HIV: Key Issues and Actions. Prepared by The UNAIDS Cosponsors Regional Group (UCRG) for Latin America and the Caribbean. 20 March 2020. UNFPA, UNICEF, UNDP, UNAIDS, WHO. https://www.paho.org/en/documents/coronavirus-disease-2019-covid-19-and-hiv-key-issues-and-actions 19The Immunization Program in the Context of the COVID-19 Pandemic - March 2020. PAHO/WHO. https://www.paho.org/en/documents/immunization-program-context-covid-19-pandemic-march-2020 20Guiding principles for immunization activities during the COVID-19 pandemic. Interim guidance. 26 March 2020. PAHO/WHO. https://apps.who.int/iris/bitstream/handle/10665/331590/WHO-2019-nCoV-immunization_services-2020.1-eng.pdf

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>f</sup> COVID-19: Operational guidance for maintaining essential health services during an outbreak. Interim guidance. 25 March 2020. WHO. <a href="https://www.who.int/publications-detail/covid-19-operational-guidance-for-maintaining-essential-health-services-during-an-outbreak">https://www.who.int/publications-detail/covid-19-operational-guidance-for-maintaining-essential-health-services-during-an-outbreak</a>

	■ Self-care programs			
2. Prenatal, perinatal, newborn, <sup>21</sup> and <1-year care	<ul> <li>Domiciliary monitoring and follow-up</li> <li>Immunizations</li> <li>Referral to specialized services</li> <li>Sampling for laboratory tests</li> <li>Prescription and dispensing of medications.</li> <li>Self-care programs</li> </ul>	<ul> <li>Care at home or in quarantine centers</li> <li>Telemedicine</li> <li>In-person care at first level-of-care centers.</li> <li>Telemedicine</li> <li>Telephone calls</li> <li>Telemessaging</li> </ul>	Individual	<sup>21</sup> COVID-19: Recomendaciones para el cuidado integral de mujeres embarazadas y recién nacidos. 27 March 2020. PAHO/WHO/CLAP.  https://www.paho.org/clap/images/PDF/COVID19embarazoyreciennacido/COVID- 19 embarazadas y recin nacidos CLAP Versin 27-03-2020.pdf?ua=1
3. Sexual and reproductive health care	<ul> <li>Domiciliary monitoring and follow-up</li> <li>Immunizations</li> <li>Dispensing of Contraceptives.</li> <li>Family planning and self-care</li> </ul>	<ul> <li>Care at home or in isolation centers for COVID-19 patients in isolation</li> <li>Telemedicine</li> <li>Telephone calls</li> <li>Telemedicine</li> </ul>	Individual Family	
4. Health care for older adults <sup>22,23</sup> (focus on people aged >60 years or living alone and caredependent)	<ul> <li>Health monitoring and follow-up, emphasizing functional and mental capacity</li> <li>Immunizations</li> <li>Dispensing medications</li> <li>Self-care programs</li> <li>Nutritional support</li> </ul>	Activation of community networks     Care at home or in quarantine centers     Telemedicine	Individual Family Community	22Infographic: COVID-19. Ways to prepare and protect yourself if you're 60+ and/or living with underlying conditions. PAHO/WHO. https://www.paho.org/en/documents/infographic-covid-19-ways-prepare-and-protect-yourself-if-youre-60-andor-living Infographic: COVID-19. Ways to help the elderly and/or people with underlying conditions living alone. PAHO/WHO. https://www.paho.org/en/documents/infographic-covid-19-ways-help-elderly-andor-people-underlying-conditions-living-alone Infographic: COVID-19. Ways you can help the elderly and people with underlying conditions living with you. PAHO/WHO. https://www.paho.org/en/documents/infographic-covid-19-ways-you-can-help-elderly-and-people-underlying-conditions-living  23Infection prevention and control guidance for long-term care facilities in the context of COVID-19: interim guidance, 21 March 2020. PAHO/WHO. https://apps.who.int/iris/handle/10665/331508
5. Mental health <sup>24,25</sup>	<ul> <li>Monitoring and follow-up</li> <li>Referral to specialized services</li> <li>Dispensing medications</li> <li>Self-care programs</li> </ul>	<ul> <li>Activation of community networks</li> <li>Care at home or in quarantine centers</li> <li>Telemedicine</li> <li>Telephone calls</li> <li>Telemessaging</li> </ul>	Individual Family Community	<sup>24</sup> Mental health and psychosocial considerations during the COVID-19 outbreak. PAHO/WHO. https://www.who.int/docs/default-source/coronaviruse/mental-health-considerations.pdf <sup>25</sup> Fact-sheet: Alcohol and COVID-19: What you need to know. PAHO/WHO. https://www.paho.org/en/documents/fact-sheet-alcohol-and-covid-19-what-you-need-know

6. Surveillance and prevention of other health risks, food safety, infections, and vectors	Home and community measures for: food safety, infections, vectors, sanitation, and hygiene <sup>26</sup>	<ul> <li>Activation of community networks</li> <li>Telemessages</li> <li>Mobile broadcasting</li> <li>Intersectoral support</li> </ul>	Community	<sup>26</sup> Key Recommendations on Water, Sanitation and Hygiene: COVID-19 in the community. PAHO/WHO. https://www.paho.org/en/documents/key-recommendations-water-sanitation-and-hygiene-covid-19-community
7. Palliative and end-of-life care	<ul> <li>Monitoring and follow-up</li> <li>Referral to specialized services</li> <li>Dispensing medications</li> </ul>	<ul> <li>Providing care to the Caregiver</li> <li>Care at home or in isolation centers</li> <li>Telemedicine</li> <li>Telephone calls</li> </ul>	Individual Family	

Facilitating a reduction in non-COVID-19 hospital care<sup>g</sup> (to strengthen its capacity to take action to reduce demand for hospital-based services during the community transmission stage of the pandemic)

INTERVENTION	ACTIVITIES	MODALITIES	SCOPE	SUPPORTING REFERENCES
1. Delivery care	Essential	<ul> <li>In-person care at first level of care or alternative center<sup>h</sup></li> <li>Home care</li> </ul>	Individual	
2. Ambulatory surgery	Establish     progressive plan for     ambulatory     surgeries at the first     level of care	In-person care at first level of care	Individual	
3. Dialysis	Establish progressive plan for opening the service	In-person care at first level of care or alternative center     Home care	Individual	

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>g</sup> Reorganization and Progressive Expansion of Health Services for the Response to the COVID-19 Pandemic. Technical Working Document. March 2020. PAHO/WHO.

<sup>h</sup> For purposes of this note, we use the term **alternative center** for facilities that have physical space set up for the exclusive management of non-COVID-19 patients requiring dialysis or delivery care. These can be day centers, private clinics, university clinics.

4. Community-	<ul> <li>Development of</li> </ul>	<ul> <li>Activation of community</li> </ul>	Individual	<sup>27</sup> Disability considerations during the COVID-19 outbreak, PAHO/WHO. Op Cit.
based	personal skills	networks		
rehabilitation <sup>27</sup>	<ul> <li>Accident and fall</li> </ul>	<ul> <li>Caregivers</li> </ul>	Family	
	prevention	<ul> <li>Home care</li> </ul>		
	<ul> <li>Healthy nutrition</li> </ul>	<ul> <li>Tele-messaging</li> </ul>	Community	
	<ul> <li>Self-care</li> </ul>	<ul> <li>Intersectoral support</li> </ul>		
	<ul> <li>Early stimulation</li> </ul>			
	<ul> <li>Providing of</li> </ul>			
	support			

Technical note. Adapting the First Level of Care in the Context of the COVID-19 Pandemic: Interventions, Modalities, and Scope, 23 April 2020

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