

Bolivia

Bolivia is among the most geographically and culturally diverse countries in Latin America and the Caribbean. Landlocked in the heart of South America, the topography ranges from glaciated Andean peaks to Amazonian lowlands where travel is limited to canoes. The largest ethnic groups are the Quechua and the Aymara, which together make up more than 50% of Bolivia's population. Seventy percent of Bolivians live in poverty. Bolivia has a maternal mortality ratio (MMR) of 390 maternal deaths per 100,000 live births—after Haiti, the highest in the western hemisphere. Maternal mortality is considerably higher in rural than in urban areas in all three of the country's main regions--the Altiplano (highlands), the valleys region and the lowland plains. The Bolivian Ministry of Health (MOH) estimates that about one-third of maternal deaths are attributable to abortion, which is most prevalent among married women with several children.



In each district MNH/Bolivia, the MOH, the municipalities and relevant nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) are working together to achieve a common goal: ensuring that women and newborns have timely access to technically competent and culturally appropriate maternal and neonatal care.

Total Population

8 million

Maternal Mortality Ratio

390/100,000 live births

Neonatal Mortality Rate

34 per 1000

Infant Mortality Rate

67 per 1000

Total Fertility Rate

4.2 children per woman

Duration of Exclusive Breastfeeding

3.9 months

Mission and Objectives

The Maternal and Neonatal Health (MNH) Program in Bolivia is working within the decentralized system to promote maternal and newborn survival in 17 districts that have disproportionately high rates of maternal deaths. These districts were chosen using a mapping tool developed by MNH/Bolivia in collaboration with the MOH, USAID and other donor and cooperating agencies. In order to maximize program impact, MNH/Bolivia chose districts that are relatively densely populated and have a poor maternal mortality situation, yet also have an average-to-good institutional capacity.

Background

In 1999, the MOH and the World Bank-sponsored Health Reform Initiative launched the Seguro Básico de Salud (SBS) or Basic Health Insurance, a package of free health services intended to expand primary care coverage, including maternal and neonatal care. The SBS covers prenatal, delivery and postpartum care, and treatment for obstetric and neonatal emergencies. For the first time in Bolivia, the SBS covers postabortion care, which has resulted in increased demand for this previously stigmatized service. The SBS also covers transportation for women suffering obstetric emergencies (although the mechanism for

reimbursement of taxi drivers or other providers of transport is not yet well established). The SBS is being implemented during a time of decentralization, when the departments (states) and municipalities are increasingly responsible for providing health services.

Country Strategy

MNH/Bolivia is engaged in three key sets of activities: strengthening community networks, strengthening service networks and building institutional capacity.

Strengthening community networks

The community networks are responsible for transport; quality assurance; community participation in the health system, including community surveillance of maternal and neonatal mortality and survival; municipal level advocacy and resource mobilization; and information, education and communication (IEC).

The program's focus is on decreasing barriers to care and increasing the awareness of the SBS among women and their families and communities. The community networks aim to increase accountability for maternal and newborn survival among local institutions such as municipalities and NGOs and to promote timely, appropriate and high quality maternal and neonatal care as a human right.

Strengthening service networks

The MNH/Bolivia service networks consist of clinical services, transport and referral systems, and interpersonal counseling and communication.

The networks will cover all MOH health facilities in the 17 districts, including district hospitals, health centers and health posts. MNH/Bolivia conducts interventions to improve these networks through clinical training and performance improvement activities for essential maternal and newborn care. Clinical training focuses on preventing complications through appropriate care of normal births and on treating common

complications, including hypovolemic and septic shock and pre-eclampsia/eclampsia. MNH/Bolivia also works closely with the Integrated Health Project (PROSIN, a bilateral USAID/MOH project) to identify facility needs in these districts. PROSIN then remodels infrastructure and provides supplies, essential drugs and IEC materials as needed. The service networks component will also train providers in Bolivia's maternal and neonatal mortality surveillance system.

Building institutional capacity

Institutional capacity building takes place at the local, departmental and national levels and includes inter-institutional collaboration, participatory planning and leveraging of resources, dissemination of lessons learned and best practices, strengthening of the national policy environment and preservice education and training.

A primary purpose of these activities is to promote the integration of the community and the service networks. Examples of MNH's contribution to capacity building include the MOH's adoption and publication of a mapping tool; the development, publication and dissemination of the National Maternal and Neonatal Health Plan; and the introduction of questions on maternal mortality into the 2001 census. MNH/Bolivia is also working to improve maternal mortality surveillance by providing technical assistance to the MOH. In the 17 priority districts, the ability of local NGOs and public municipal organizations to promote maternal and neonatal survival is often hindered by the lack of communication between these organizations. MNH/Bolivia, in collaboration with UNFPA, local NGOs and other partners, has helped the municipality of El Alto design an integrated IEC strategy for health promotion. The municipality will now be able to conduct IEC campaigns that convey appropriate messages on maternal and newborn health and that promote local health facilities.

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For more information about the MNH Program visit our website:
www.mnh.jhpiego.org