



GLOBAL HEALTH TECHNICAL BRIEF

BETTER HEALTH MEXICO

The Better Health Programme Mexico (BHPMX) (2019–2022) was established by the UK’s Foreign Commonwealth and Development Office to support inclusive economic growth and partnership between the UK and Mexico. The initiatives focused on tackling non-communicable diseases and strengthening health human resources.

In partnership with the Mexican Secretariat of Health, the programme provided a vehicle for knowledge exchange and long-term, cross-cultural, collaboration between universities, regulators, governments and health services in Mexico and England. The Better Health Programme also developed activities, based on the project’s research and knowledge around obesity prevention, diabetes detection and control, and Mexico’s healthcare worker skill gap.

Building sustainable partnerships

Policy Exchanges

BHPMx established cross-governmental partnerships to develop effective obesity prevention policies through partnerships with the UK's Department of Health and Social Care, Public Health England, Mexico's Secretariat of Health and its National Institute of Public Health (INSP). Workshops were held to facilitate mutual learning from both countries and to contextualise the Mexican and British obesity policy environment. Advertising and marketing restrictions, fiscal measures, reformulation and front of package labelling were discussed, to gain deeper understanding on the challenges of policy implementation and evaluation.

Course Development

A diverse team of academics from public, private and civil society organisations in Mexico and the UK including the National Autonomous University of Mexico, TecSalud, Oxford University and el Museo Memoria y Tolerancia were identified to develop a Primary Healthcare Management Diploma for local health managers using digital platforms. Feedback from participants was overwhelmingly positive. The diverse content and delivery methods from UK and Mexican partners allowed them to improve their practice in primary healthcare. Furthermore, Mexico's Secretariat of Health plans to make the Diploma self-directed to reach over 3,000 local health managers across Mexico.

Academic Partnerships

BHPMx also brokered support from the UK's National Health Service Joint Unit, Health Education England, and British nursing professionals to share experiences on advanced practice nursing with Mexico's National School of Nursing and Obstetrics. The school's Director, Rosa Zárate said: "We are very proud to be involved in an international project within the Better Health Program. It is an excellent learning opportunity between Mexico and the United Kingdom to contribute to the expansion of the role of nursing in our country and to start training a new generation of researchers." The programme established effective working relationships among the various institutions that will continue beyond the lifetime of the programme.

Applying social behaviour change

BHPMx aimed to reduce obesity using behavioural science methodologies through three main activities: 1) creating tools for local authorities to develop obesity prevention policies, 2) a pilot project designed to change behaviour toward food, based on field research from Zapopan municipality, 3) a behaviour change course for policymakers from the Mexican Social Security Institute, developed in collaboration with University College London's Centre for Behaviour Change.

Tools for Local Authorities

BHPMx partnered with University College London's Institute for Health Equity and the High Impact Social Innovation Centre at the Jesuit University of Guadalajara (CISAI/ITESO) to develop a research framework assessing the social determinants of obesity in the municipality of Zapopan, Jalisco. The framework was developed using the Behaviour Change Wheel (BCW), which describes the drivers of behaviour, such as capabilities, opportunity and motivation, to pinpoint behaviours that can be changed.

The new framework and accompanying report helped local authorities understand the social determinants of obesity in their local area. In addition, BHPMx worked with CISAI/ITESO to adapt and translate Public Health England's 'Whole Systems Approach to Obesity' for local policymakers. These tools can be shared with other local authorities to help improve understanding of social determinants of obesity and develop suitable interventions.

Pilot Project

BHPMx formed a multi-disciplinary Behaviour Change Intervention Group comprised of academics, researchers, health institutions, local government, and advertising companies to develop interventions in Zapopan municipality. Following research, analysis and consultations, the group developed a mass media campaign aimed at reducing sugar consumption within Zapopan. The campaign targets women, as key influencers within the home and aims to empower them to make healthier, better informed decisions about food and nutrition. Dra. Anabelle Bonvecchio Arenas, Director of Research on Nutrition Policies and Programmes, INSP, said: "It has been a very gratifying experience to be part of the expert panel. Having these very different perspectives is not only enriching but also an opportunity to learn and to strengthen the field of behavioural science in Mexico."

Empowering Healthcare Professionals with Digital Tools and Training

Digital Tools

BHPMx adapted and delivered an e-health tool, MicroGuide® (developed by Horizon Strategic Partners and used by the UK's National Health Service), to provide clinicians access to diagnosis and treatment guidelines for non-communicable diseases. Managers and representatives from the Mexican Institute for Social Security (IMSS) were trained to upload and manage content on the platform, increasing access to guidelines for type two diabetes and hypertension. This ultimately improved clinical effectiveness and efficiency in the delivery of care.

“The training we have received from Horizon Strategic Partners has allowed us to be independent in uploading and managing content on the MicroGuide platform. We believe this platform will be of great support to the medical personnel in IMSS, for them to use the institutional clinical algorithms and protocols when caring for their patients.” Dr. Norma Palacios, Medical Benefits Directorate IMSS.

MicroGuide

The MicroGuide platform successfully supported clinical decision-making in the UK and 17 other countries. It is used in 150 medical organisations and has 200,000 users worldwide. This platform covers a wide range of clinical guidelines, from antibiotic use to medical care of COVID-19 patients.

Training

BHPMx organised and held the Knowledge and Transformation Forum 2020 focussing on primary care education and training best practices. As part of the forum, BHPMx delivered a course on digital skills to over 1,000 health workers from Mexico and other countries in Latin America. The participants learned about using technology for remote clinical care including: safety and confidentiality when using mobile phones for patient care, and effectively undertaking remote consultations – both of which were relevant during the COVID-19 pandemic.

“Thanks to the behaviour change course, we learned to identify different types of interventions that can be performed and can be carried out in IMSS sessions in order to incentivise and motivate our patients to make some behavioural changes in their eating habits.”

*Juan Carlos Tomás
López, Medical Benefits
Directorate, IMSS.*

Digital Health Solutions: E-learning Modules

For health workers in Mexico pursuing continuous professional development, digital learning can be a challenge as a high number of health centres do not have a continuous and reliable internet connection. Additionally, most of the opportunities for continuous professional development have an out-of-pocket cost and take place in major cities, which can become a barrier to accessing high-quality materials—especially for health professionals working in remote regions. BHPMx supported e-learning solutions which are available offline (only requiring internet connection to download the materials) on smartphone and free of cost. One of these courses specifically aims to build “Digital skills in primary care”, supporting health workers lacking these essential skills.

The following training materials were also developed:

- For primary health care clinicians: two e-learning modules on “Clinical Management of Overweight, Obesity and Diabetes” and “Digital skills for primary healthcare” were developed with Primary Care International and Universidad Nacional Autónoma de México (UNAM). Modules will be transferred to UNAM, IMSS and the Comité Normativo Nacional de Medicina General providing direct access to interested health workers.
- For health managers, a “Diploma Course to Strengthen the PHC Management Skills of Jurisdictional and District Heads” which addresses leadership, health quality, resource management and monitoring within the Mexican health system.
- For Nurses, BHPMx adapted the “Diploma Course in Nursing Comprehensive Care in Diabetes with a primary health care approach” through a curricular review conducted by Health Education England and the UK’s National Health Service Joint Unit. BHPMx also supported the design of three of the Diploma’s modules, which was offered to over 100 practicing nurses in 2021. Additionally, 60 nurses registered for a new Advanced Nursing Training of Trainers course, delivered through Mexico’s National School of Nursing and Obstetrics (See Empowering Nurses to Strengthen the Mexican Health System).
- For health policy makers, in collaboration with University College London’s Centre for Behaviour Change, BHPMx delivered training to 25 policymakers from the IMSS. The behavioural change course was based on the behaviour change wheel framework which introduced behaviour change approaches at the federal level to tackle obesity.

Strengthening health systems for pandemic preparedness

Evidence notes that non-communicable diseases, such as obesity and diabetes, increase people's vulnerability to COVID-19. With its focus on non-communicable disease prevention, BHPMx adapted activities to directly respond to related COVID-19 priorities.

Supporting Health Human Resources

BHPMx adapted Human Resources for Health activities by supporting the Mexican Secretariat of Health's strategy to expand nursing role. The government wanted to introduce an advanced nursing role for several years, and COVID-19 highlighted the need for more nurses with advanced treatment skills in leadership positions. BHPMx produced a comparative analysis of advanced practice nursing in the UK and Mexico to identify facilitators, barriers, and next steps to effectively introduce the role while learning from the COVID-19 pandemic. Advanced nursing enables 'task shifting' and greater nursing autonomy, improving health care services.

Training for emergency response

BHPMx adapted a health manager diploma to include content on responding to infectious diseases in emergencies. Content included detail reorganising healthcare facilities and leveraging networks based experience from COVID-19.

Knowledge Sharing

As BHPMx stakeholders' priorities were diverted to the COVID-19 response, BHPMx shared emerging evidence on the pandemic's link to obesity and health inequities through knowledge sharing webinars. By engaging senior representatives of Mexico's INSP, Public Health England, the National Health Service Joint Unit, and the British Embassy in Mexico, both countries benefitted from discussing data sources, modelling methods and health inequity measurement approaches. This engagement and knowledge sharing spurred further workshops and learning, including one on Obesity Prevention Policies.