



Mobilizing Communities in Puerto Rico to Meet the Needs of Vulnerable Populations Before, During and After a Natural Disaster



Project Team

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About Migrant Clinicians Network

MCN is a force for health justice, creating practical solutions at the intersection of vulnerability, migration, and health. We develop clinical and patient programs and resources and provide bridge case management, technical assistance and continuing education to clinicians, community health centers and other health care delivery sites. We aim to improve the quality of health care and reduce disparities for immigrants and other underserved vulnerable populations. MCN has a long history of partnering with Puerto Rico's community health centers and regional and community organizations to address environmental health, worker health and safety, infectious diseases, emergency preparedness and immunizations. Our Puerto Rican office focuses on health and equity with an emphasis on addressing the impact of climate change.

Background



Hurricane Maria wiped away this bridge, completely cutting off a small community nestled in the mountains of Puerto Rico.

In 2017, Puerto Rico was hit by Hurricanes Irma and Maria, causing approximately 2,975 excess deaths and leaving most of the Island's infrastructure destroyed. The hurricanes strained the Puerto Rican healthcare system in ways that were unforeseen prior to the disaster, compounding and amplifying deep-seated problems. The crisis also underscored the resiliency of many communities in their fight to survive and rebuild. The CHCs served as a lifeline and became a central hub of immediate aid and continue to play a critical role in long-term recovery. Building on this role to foster the community's ability to prepare and respond to future events is critical given the population's susceptibility to hazards and impacts of climate change. The overarching goal of this project is to build capacity among health centers to employ a community mobilization framework for emergency preparedness in order to improve health outcomes of vulnerable populations before, during and after a disaster.

Community Mobilization Approach



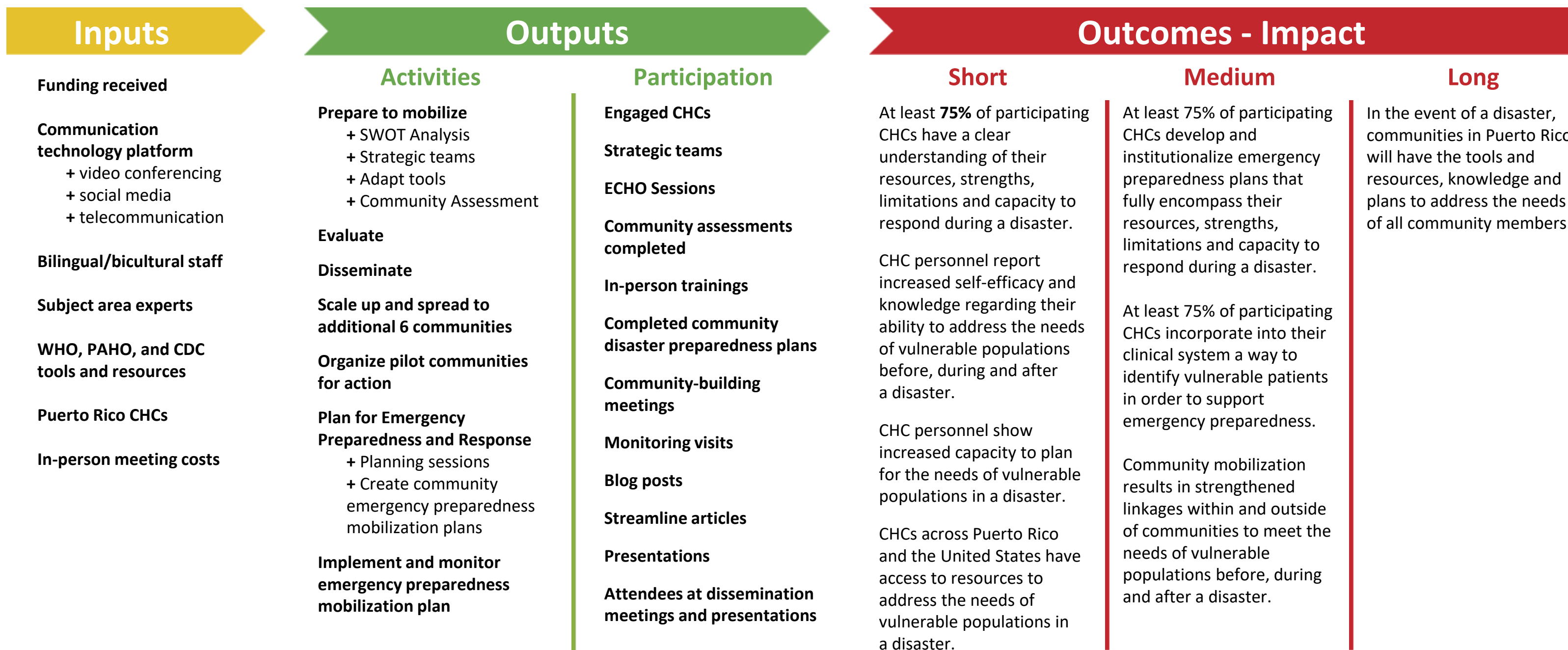
CSM went door-to-door checking on their patients after Hurricane Maria.

Community mobilization employs a cross-sectoral, community-based, participatory approach to address health, social, or environmental issues, empowering individuals and groups to take action to facilitate change, including policy change. This model has been utilized by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention and World Health Organization to successfully tackle specific diseases or community health concerns in the US and internationally.

Project Overview

Problem: Recent hurricanes in Puerto Rico exposed systemic problems and challenges in meeting basic healthcare needs of vulnerable populations, particularly those with chronic disease or mental health conditions.

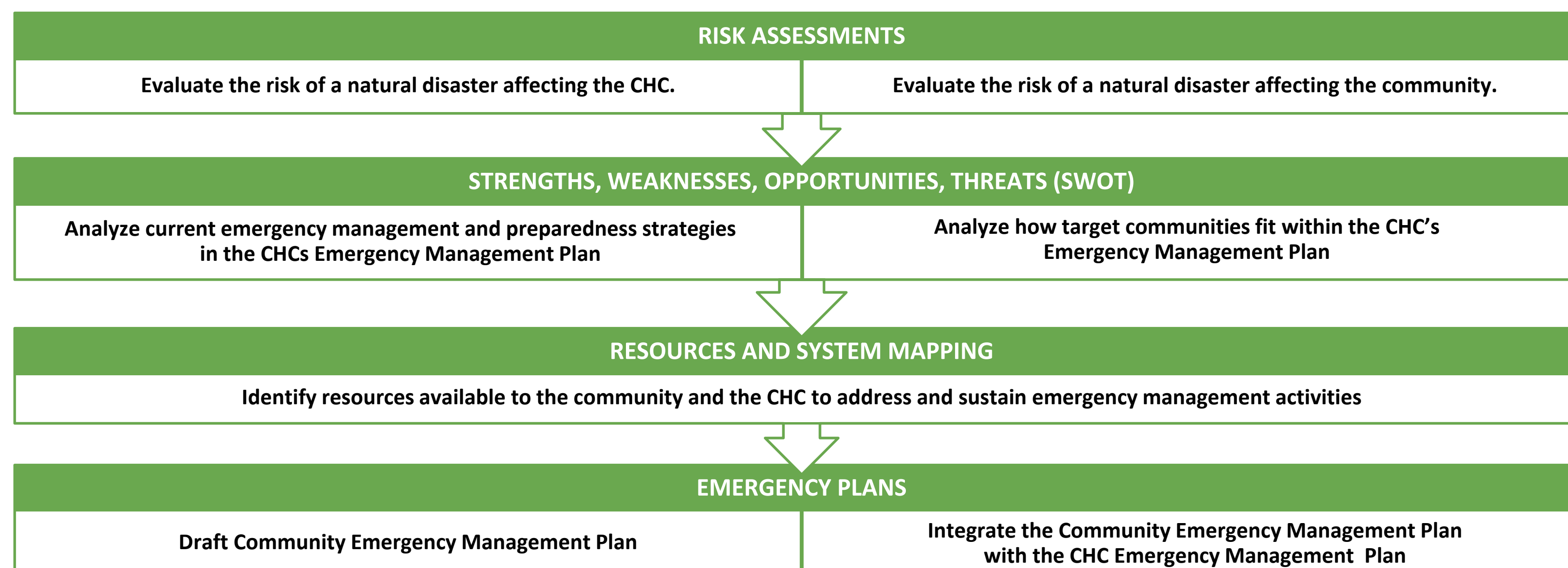
Vision: Community Health Centers (CHCs) in Puerto Rico will incorporate a community mobilization approach to emergency preparedness; that fosters a resilient community with skills and knowledge to prepare for, and to remain safe, during and after a disaster.



Activities



Year 1: Pilot project with two community health centers | Year 2: Spread to additional community health centers



Partnering with Community Health Centers



Our CSM partners discuss resource mapping as one of our project key activities.

In project year 1, MCN is partnering with two community health centers, Hospital General Castañer (HGC) and Corporación de Servicios Médicos (CSM), along with the communities they serve, to develop and pilot this initiative. HGC serves several rural, agricultural communities in the mountains of central Puerto Rico including Castañer, Adjuntas and Jayuya. CSM serves several of the island's northern towns including Hatillo, Arecibo, Utuado and Aguadilla. Many of these communities were hardest hit by Hurricane Maria. The vast majority of patients served by these health centers are Hispanic and live at or below the federal poverty line.

In project year 2, MCN plans to partner with additional community health centers.



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Acknowledgments



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