

Accessing HIV - STIs services in the time of COVID-19 in Puerto Rico

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B. Community Perspectives: Addressing HIV, HCV and STI's during and after COVID-19
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Puerto Rico in the Caribbean



The islands of PR



INC.

History of Puerto Rico

Nov 19, 1493 – Christopher Columbus discovered the island of PR,
first known as San Juan Bautista

1493-1898 – territory of Spain

1898 – USA invaded Puerto Rico

1898-2020 – territory of the United States of America

Other US territories are American Samoa / Federated States of
Micronesia / Guam / Marshall Islands / Northern Mariana Islands / US
Virgin Islands, and Republic of Palau



Notes about Puerto Rico

Population – 3,656,388

Main foreign populations living in PR – Dominicans and Colombians

Main language – Spanish

Puertorricans are US citizens by birth or by adoption

People living in PR can't vote for the President of the US but can choose candidates under Republican and Democratic parties

For DHHS purposes, PR is defined as “Dependent Area”



Puerto Rico – 78 municipalities



Economical challenges in PR since 2016



The **Puerto Rico Oversight, Management, and Economic Stability Act (PROMESA)** is a [US federal law](#) enacted in 2016 that established a financial oversight board, a process for restructuring debt, and expedited procedures for approving critical infrastructure projects in order to combat the [Puerto Rican government-debt crisis](#).

Through PROMESA, the US Congress established an appointed Fiscal Control Board (FCB) to oversee the [debt restructuring](#).

PROMESA

Legislative history

- **Introduced in the [House of Representatives](#) as H.R.4900 by [Sean Duffy](#) on May 18, 2016**
- **Committee consideration by [United States House Committee on Natural Resources](#) Judiciary; Education and the Workforce**
- **Passed the 114th Congress (2015-2016) on June 9th, 2016**
- **Signed into law by President [Barack Obama](#) on June 30, 2016**



Other challenges in PR

- September 2017 – Hurricane María hit PR leaving 4,645 deaths
- January 2020 – earthquakes in the south side of the island
- March 2020 – COVID-19
- April 2020 – more earthquakes around the Island
- June 1 to November 30, 2020 – hurricane season
- November 3, 2020 – Election Day in PR



Other conditions impacted the world not only HIV and COVID-19

1347 - Peste negra, peste bubónica o muerte negra

1530 - Sífilis

1757 - Sarampión

1879 - Gonorrea

1882 - Tuberculosis

1883 - Difteria

1897 - Malaria

1900 - Polio

1918 - Influenza

1938 - Clamidia



Other conditions impacted the world not only HIV and COVID-19 (continue)

1947 - Zika

1976 - Ébola

1977 - Dengue

1981 – VIH

2003 - SARS or Severe Acute Respiratory Syndrome

2009 - Gripe Aviar o H1N1

2012 - MERS or Middle East Respiratory Syndrome

2013 – Chikungunya

2019 – COVID-19



Coaí, Inc.

Non-profit organization established in 1991 and dedicated to health promotion and disease prevention from a social justice and human rights perspective, with emphasis on serving lesbians, homosexuals, bisexual, transgender, transsexual, queer, questioning and intersex (LGBTQQI) people in Puerto Rico.

Five offices located in:

North – Bayamón, Miramar and Hato Rey

South - Juana Díaz

West - Mayagüez



HIV / AIDS cases in Puerto Rico

Issue on a monthly basis by the PR DoH AIDS Surveillance office

- Cumulative HIV cases as of May 31, 2020 – 11,319
- Cumulative AIDS cases as of May 31, 2020 – 38,845
- Cumulative total – 50,163 (29,766 have died / 59% of case fatality rate)



STI's cases in Puerto Rico

Issue on a yearly basis by the PR DoH

Increase in cases of Syphilis, Gonorrhea, and Chlamydia



COVID-19 statistics in Puerto Rico

As of June 3, 2020

4,023 confirmed cases

(2,710 – serologic or rapid / 1,313 – moleculars or PCA)

3,883 active cases

140 deaths

(65 reported by PR DoH / 75 reported by Demographic Registry)

Breakdown by sex

- 2,045 women (50.83%),
- 1,978 men (49.17%)

Dashboard webpage

<https://bioseguridad.maps.arcgis.com/apps/opsdashboard/index.html#/3bfb64c9a91944bc8c41edd8ff27e6df>



COVID-19 statistics in Puerto Rico

Breakdown by age range

< 10	076
10-19	138
20-29	535
30-39	620
40-49	712
50-59	812
60-69	608
70-79	329
80 >	176
N/A	017
	4,023

Breakdown by Health Region

Metro	1,142
Bayamón	775
Caguas	541
Mayagüez	536
Ponce	436
Arecibo	330
Fajardo	140
EU	015
(10-NY / 2-NJ / 1-FL / 2-other place out PR)	
N/A	108
	4,023



PR COVID-19 Dashboard limitations

- ❖ No breakdown available by sexual orientation or gender identity
- ❖ Inconsistency in number of test purchased, distributed, and performed by PR DoH
- ❖ Adjustment in cases by PR DoH in cases reported due to duplicity
- ❖ PR DoH ceased to issue the number of tests performed
- ❖ Inconsistency between tests performed in airport, by FQHC, and private laboratories and numbers reported by PR DoH



Structural challenges around COVID-19 in PR

Since summer of 2019 we have had 3 Governors

Ricardo Rosselló-Nevarez

Pedro R Pierluisi-Urrutia

Wanda Vázquez-Garced

Since March 2020 we have had 3 Secretaries of the DoH

Dr. Rafael Rodríguez-Mercado

Dra. Concepción Quiñones de Longo – Interim

Dr. Lorenzo González-Feliciano (Secretary of PR DoH under Luis Guillermo Fortuño Bursset Administration (2009-2013))

Since March 2020 we have had 2 State Epidemiologists

Carmen Deseda – resigned on March 26, 2020

David Capó (April 1, 2020 – May 31, 2020)



Curfews and lockdowns

On March 13, 2020 Governor Wanda Vazquez-Garced declared both

- March 13, 2020 – March 30, 2020 9pm – 5am
- March 31, 2020 – April 12, 2020 7pm – 5am
 - Sundays April 5 & 12, 2020 – no vehicles permitted
- April 13, 2020 – May 3, 2020 9pm – 5am
 - April 15, 2020 changes to 7pm – 5am
- May 4, 2020 – May 25, 2020 7pm – 5am
- May 26, 2020 – June 15, 2020 7pm – 5am



Impact of curfew and lockdowns

- Beaches closed
- Churches closed
- Movie theaters closed
- Shopping malls closed
- Massive transportation services (train system and buses) as well as individual services (taxis and UBER) closed
- 2/3 of the hotels closed



Impact in LGBTTTQQI communities

- Bars and discotheques closed
- Commercial or survival sex work impacted
- XXX LGBTTTQQI Pride March schedule for June 28, 2020 was cancelled *
- XVIII Boquerón Pride Schedule for June 11-14, 2020 is postponed *

* venues where our CBO performed free HIV testing and STI's screening



What have we done in Coai, Inc.!

- Develop COVID-19 safety protocols for employees and participants
- Keep working from office
- Passive referrals (by phone and emails)
- Passive navigation of services (by phone and emails)
- Develop conversatories (“lives” to clarify information around COVID-19)
- Distribute meals for people in need under the Care Act



Central government shutdown

Public employees sent home and pay them while staying at home

Only essential services permitted (health, security, supermarkets, pharmacies, and medical offices for cancer, and dialysis services, among others)

Governor appointed a Medical Task Force



Department of Family

- Services available on-line only
- Ceased services for elderly and people with functional diversity



Department of Education

- Closed school food programs
- On-line classes
- Ceased Special Education program



Department of the Treasury

- Postponed 2019 taxes for July 15, 2020
- In charge of the distribution of the federal economic aid of \$1,200.00 which people received 2 months later and most are still waiting for it.



Department of Labor and Human Resources

Unemployment benefits available by request on-line



Department of Health

- CPTET / HRSA Part B clinics – services offer in limited days and hours
- Medical orders sent to pharmacies by email
- Medical appointments by phone instead of physical
- Hospitals cancelled elective surgeries
- Med supplies up to 3 months
- Metadone and buprenorphine services suspended



Other Health Services

- Municipality of San Juan
HRSA Part A clinics – services offer in limited days and hours
- FQHC – services offer in limited days and hours



Mental Health Services

ASSMCA

Administración de Servicios de Salud Mental
y Contra la Adicción)
(our local SAMHSA)

Help line attending an average of 1,800 calls daily
(line available 24 hours)



Correctional Department

- Our system is managed by 4 areas
 - Public
 - Private
 - Youth
 - Mental Health Services
- Until a few weeks ago no protocol was in-place for release incarcerated population at risk for COVID-19



Next challenge

Following Ending the Epidemic while
dealing with COVID-19 epidemic



Thanks!!!



**To all the front-line workers
and first responders!!!**

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