

## Report to the Canadian Friends of Hôpital Albert Schweitzer Improving Maternal and Child Health Outcomes – 2020 Activities Hôpital Albert Schweitzer Haiti May 2021

### OVERVIEW

The mission of Hôpital Albert Schweitzer (HAS) is to collaborate with the people of the Artibonite Valley as they strive to improve their health and quality of life while providing quality health care through its main hospital campus and four community health centers. As is the case throughout the world, the past year has been deeply challenging at HAS. Before the global pandemic, Haiti experienced intermittent lockdown or “Peyi Lòk” in 2018 and 2019 that for weeks at a time caused local residents to fear leaving their homes due to frequent road blockades and mass demonstrations. HAS is constantly confronted with the challenge of delivering healthcare in this mountainous and rural community in periods of political unrest. This continued to affect hospital activities in the early months of 2020; and lingering effects are still felt today.

The arrival of the global health crisis brought on by the COVID-19 outbreak created a set of new challenges, stretching our capacity in many instances. This resulted in many of HAS’ programs and activities involving non-emergency care being suspended for several months in 2020. But our doors remained open throughout all of 2020 for all emergency surgeries and care, COVID-19 treatment and essential health services, in particular, maternity and pediatric care services.

This year marks 65 years of exceptional work with a dedicated staff on the front lines saving lives every day. Despite the effects of the global pandemic, **your steadfast support continually reinforces HAS’ ability to fully respond to the needs of the Artibonite Valley’s beneficiaries and changing healthcare landscape.**

### THE COVID-19 EFFECT ON HAS PROGRAMS AND SERVICES

March 2020 ushered the arrival of the coronavirus global pandemic. In response, the Haitian Ministry of Health designated HAS as one of the COVID-19 treatment sites in the Artibonite region. HAS immediately devised and activated its COVID-19 Emergency Response and Prevention Plan to mitigate the spread of the virus and converted its Cholera Treatment Center into as a care site for coronavirus patients. The hospital began to receive the first wave of suspected cases in April 2020.

There was a tremendous amount of anxiety about virus in the community; lack of information and lack of education created a stigma about contracting coronavirus. Because of this stigma, people with symptoms in many cases waited until they were critically ill before seeking treatment. In the early stages of COVID-19, HAS employed a robust communication and awareness strategy to mitigate virus transmission and for overall safety purposes. Community Health Workers (CHWs) received in-depth COVID-19 training, communicating primarily via radio but also taking to the streets by canvassing local and neighboring rural communities with megaphones, sharing messages to improve hygiene and

increase social distancing. At the hospital, emergency protocols and containment procedures were enforced to curb transmission of the virus.

To date, HAS has **treated 89 confirmed COVID-19 cases, with 22 fatalities**. Thankfully the virus has not devastated Haiti and case numbers continue to be low compared to other countries, such as neighboring Dominican Republic. As of May 13, 2021, Haiti has reported 13,227 total cases, 12,397 recovered cases and 266 total deaths country-wide.

### Continued Essential Health Services

In the midst of treatment for COVID-19, HAS continued to provide essential health services by remaining open 24/7, providing vital maternal and child health services including high-risk obstetrics, prenatal and neonatal care and pediatric services. We continued to perform emergency and critical surgeries and to receive acutely ill patients at the hospital. Though HAS remained open, many of the local residents deferred health services during the worst part of the COVID-19 outbreak. Despite this, since May 2020, the number of patients coming to HAS for care have more than doubled.

Given that Haiti still has some of the lowest health outcomes in the world for women and children, the arrival of **COVID-19 further reinforced HAS' commitment to providing quality community-based maternal and child health services** – thus bringing preventative care to people where they live, and in treating patients effectively outside of the over-burdened and more costly hospital setting.

The following is a brief overview of the excellent work conducted in these areas:

## MATERNAL HEALTH SERVICES

### Obstetrics and Gynecology

HAS's reputation for high-quality, compassionate maternity care remains among the best in all of Haiti. With **an average of over 700 prenatal consultations performed each month**, virtually 100% of pregnant women in our service area will have at least one consultation with a skilled professional before they give birth; these women can be also referred to the hospital in the case of complications. At the main hospital, HAS specializes in high-risk pregnancies; tellingly, **approximately 28% of deliveries at the hospital are done by Cesarean section**, in order to prevent further serious complications or to save the lives of mother and baby.



**Approximately 35% of all births, however, still occur at home.** To make home births safer, HAS trained approximately 280 traditional birth attendants to employ safe, sterile birthing techniques and to observe the warning signs of an emergency requiring referral to the hospital. Mothers in the HAS service area network receive at least one consultation with a skilled professional before giving birth. HAS' excellent medical staff provide lifesaving, resource-intensive care to a growing number of expectant mothers suffering from serious conditions such as preeclampsia, placenta previa, post-partum hemorrhage, and peripartum cardiomyopathy.

Today, these trained birth attendants **assist in an average of 78 home deliveries per month**. With 95% coverage for post-natal follow-up in our primary care service area, HAS aims to provide a true continuum of

maternal healthcare to make the entire experience as safe as possible for mother and baby. **Maternal, newborn, and pediatric care accounts for roughly 60% of HAS's services** and also put an enormous strain on the hospital's financial and material resources.

2020 Obstetrics and Gynecology highlights:

- **8,492 prenatal consultations were completed** (an average of **708 consultations per month**);
- Of the total of **2,774 babies** delivered safely, **715 caesarean sections were performed representing 25% of all deliveries**;
- **777 pregnancy complications** were registered ranging from preeclampsia, miscarriages, dystocia, and stillborn (an increase of 29% from 2019);
- Maternal deaths were the lowest in over 5 years with only **4 registered deaths**.

With 95% coverage for post-natal follow-up in our primary care service area, HAS provides a true continuum of maternal healthcare to make the entire experience as safe as possible for mother and baby.

**Table 1**

Description	2019	2020	% change
Hospital deliveries	2,055	1,839	-5.5%
Home deliveries	1,124	935	-9.2%
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>3,179</b>	<b>2,774</b>	<b>-6.8%</b>

*Note: A slight decline in the number of recorded births overall in 2020*

### Community-Based Women's Health Services

While maternal health services are still in high demand, reinforced by a cadre of clinicians and CHWs, HAS provides the majority of its primary and preventive women's reproductive health services at the community level. Basic services include pre- and post- natal care and breastfeeding support for pregnant women and new mothers, administering vaccines, malnutrition treatment and prevention, diabetes, and hypertension screenings. Children and families also receive all required childhood immunizations and health education on various topics such as nutrition, sanitation and hygiene, and family planning counseling and services.

Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, community health maternal and pediatric services were severely affected and at a standstill for the months of March through June 2020 (and in some cases July and August), thus affecting the service delivery statistics. In 2020, **67,865 health consultations** were conducted in comparison to **117,331 consultations in 2019, a decrease by 42%**.

2020 Community-based Maternal Health Highlights:

- **More than 82,000 beneficiaries participated in community health education sessions** and over **51,000 home visits** were conducted to discuss topics ranging from good hygiene and sanitation practices to reproductive health and pregnancy, water treatment and cholera.
- **8,499 prenatal consults and 1,730 postnatal consultations** were held at community health centers;
- **935 births** were registered in the community, assisted by a traditional birth attendant;
- **16,282 family planning/reproductive health consultations** with women (and men). This follows the trend of a steady increase in the demand for family planning services.

In addition, tests for illnesses like malaria and HIV are provided for all pregnant women and for those testing positive, they are linked with a health provider for an affordable treatment plan.

## CHILDREN'S HEALTH SERVICES

### Neonatal and Pediatric Health Services

In spite of the challenges of 2020, over **51,000 patient days were registered** in the hospital, almost 50% of which were dedicated to pediatric patients. Care provided to children at HAS generally falls into three categories:

- neonatal care,
- pediatric surgeries, and
- nutrition rehabilitation.

HAS **provided neonatal care to 808 patients**, which is slightly higher than the five-year average of 780 neonatal cases per year.

For inpatient care to infants and children, there were a total of **3,633 pediatric patient admissions**, with an average length of stay of 4.5 days. Of the total number of 2,600 surgeries performed at HAS, **476 pediatric surgeries** were recorded; a significant 5-year low.

A 19% increase from 2019, **295 children** participated in the malnutrition program. Of them, **150 were severely malnourished children** and were admitted into the Nutrition Stabilization Unit to receive specialized treatment. The malnutrition treatment program is 100% subsidized, therefore no financial burden is imposed on the parent for their child's inpatient stay at the main hospital, which averages three weeks. This Unit continues to be a critical service for the community to positively address and continue in the prevention of severe childhood malnutrition.

### Community Children's Health Services

With a strong team of dedicated auxiliary nurses, aide auxiliaries, and community health workers (CHWs), HAS provides clinical care and education to mothers and children at mobile clinics and community health posts. At the beginning of each child health post, the CHW conducts an educational session on one of the following topics: early and exclusive breastfeeding, complementary feeding, immunizations, diarrhea prevention and management, and pre- and post-natal care.

Normally, children in HAS' service area remain within the normal weight range during the first six months, when breast-feeding is an exclusive or primary source of nutrition. At about the six-month range, some children begin to show the effects of the transition to an adult diet, which is difficult to absorb initially. Reduced food intake leaves the child more susceptible to infections, which in turn makes it more difficult for food to be absorbed in a vicious cycle of declining weight and infections. Therefore, malnutrition screening/prevention and nutrition rehabilitation at the community level continue to be vital.



HAS community health centers and CHW network also emphasize child health in a variety of ways.

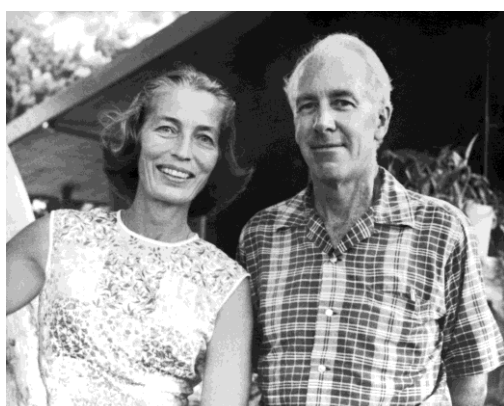
Programs offering nutrition screenings, immunizations, distribution of vitamins and deworming medication are targeted for reducing child mortality, particularly in the crucial first 1,000 days of life. During this critical time period, proper nutrition and health can profoundly impact a child's ability to grow, learn, and live a full and productive life. This work conducted by our committed staff demonstrate that interventions at the community level are lifesaving by positively addressing and preventing severe childhood malnutrition.

In 2020, community-based health services were provided to tens of thousands of children:

- Over **16,000 pediatric consultations** were conducted in community health centers and via mobile clinics;
- CHWs performed a total of **67,098 screenings for malnutrition** for children 5 and under by measuring average middle upper arm circumference (MUAC);
- **An average of 5,991 children were weighed each month** (for a total of 71,893 children) as another malnutrition screening measure;
- **295 at-risk children** benefited from specialized preventive treatment for malnutrition through the community-based malnutrition program and nutrition stabilization program;
- Almost **15,202 doses of Vitamin A** (important for preventing childhood blindness) were given to children between 6 months and 6 years;
- **7,332 doses of albendazole** (deworming medication) were distributed to children with diarrhea, an easy and effective way to prevent malnutrition, anemia and even death due to diarrheal disease;
- **1,059 children 1 year and under** completed all of their required vaccinations.

## CONCLUSION

The socio-economic outlook in the l'Artibonite region seems even more bleak amid the COVID-19 pandemic, but we are thankful that coronavirus did not devastate our community as deeply as had been predicted. In spite of the persistent tense political situation, we continue to move forward in providing our constituents with the best healthcare.



In our **65<sup>th</sup> year** of operation, we honor our founders Dr. Larry and Gwen Mellon for the work begun in 1956. Today, we continue that work with dedicated partners such as you, Canadian Friends of Hôpital Albert Schweitzer. With your generous support, we have become a valued staple in the most rural of communities in the l'Artibonite Valley as we provide quality and dependable maternal and child care. Your vital financial support permits HAS to meet these needs and continue to improve health outcomes for thousands of mothers and children in our service region.



**Thank you! Mèsi anpil!**