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## **Advancing efforts in malaria control and protecting indigenous peoples in the Americas**

### **Indigenous peoples are key to achieving further reductions in malaria**

The United States Agency for International Development (USAID), the Pan American Health Organization (PAHO), and partners of the Amazon Malaria Initiative (AMI) join other actors in observing the International Day of the World's Indigenous Peoples on August 9, 2014, which this year focuses on "Bridging the gap: implementing the rights of indigenous peoples."

Although PAHO data shows that the number of malaria cases declined by 60% in the region of the Americas from 2001-2012, indigenous or Amerindian peoples experience an unequal share of the remaining burden of disease. Along with highly mobile groups such as gold miners and migrant workers, indigenous communities tend to face a higher malaria risk due to remoteness, living conditions, and inadequate health services. Official data shows that although indigenous ethnicities make up only 10% of the total population in both Guyana and Panama, 30% of Guyana's and 89% of Panama's confirmed cases of malaria occurred among indigenous populations in 2013. In addition, while indigenous peoples make up roughly 8% of the total Nicaraguan population, they account for around 27% of all malaria cases.

Panama, Guyana, and Nicaragua are among select countries that participate in regional collaborative efforts for malaria control that have begun work to close the gap between the indigenous and non-indigenous populations by combining their own resources with USAID-sponsored technical assistance. In the indigenous Miskito community of Waspán, located in Nicaragua's remote North Atlantic Autonomous Region (RAAN), the National Malaria Control Program helped to dramatically reduce the number of malaria cases from 1,900 during the period from 2001-2006, to 340 in 2007-2011. The decrease in cases in this municipality (population 47,231 in 2005) occurred as a result of a community-based prevention and control approach that was implemented by local Miskito-speaking volunteers who conducted malaria education, diagnosis, treatment, and anti-larval control activities. Continuous action is required considering that Waspán is one of a small number of Nicaraguan municipalities that continues to have local transmission of malaria.

One way that USAID supports continued progress in malaria prevention and control is by planning approaches in collaboration with Ministries of Health in the Amazon basin and Central America that consider the impact of activities on indigenous populations. Countries in the region increasingly recognize the importance of focusing on indigenous peoples in order to avoid widespread reemergence of this preventable and treatable disease. USAID supports country planning and formative research efforts to guide improvements in the delivery of health services and ensure that all populations at risk of malaria have access to proper diagnosis and treatment.

For more information please visit <http://www.usaidami.org/>

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