

NUTRITION

THE CHALLENGE

Guatemala has the highest rate of chronic childhood malnutrition in Central America and one of the highest rates in the world, exceeding 80% in some rural indigenous communities. Although Guatemala is a major agricultural producer, most farmers grow their crops for export and many families lack access to diverse, nutritious diets.

The COVID pandemic and hurricanes Eta and Iota wiped out food sources and jobs, further compounding the problem. By early June 2020, reports of children experiencing acute malnutrition had spiked to one every 30 minutes. The number of people in Guatemala needing emergency food aid doubled to 1.2 million between January 2020 and January 2021.

In addition to height and weight, chronic malnutrition affects brain development, especially cognitive and motor skills. It has lifetime implications, increasing the risk for respiratory and digestive infections and chronic diseases such as diabetes, renal failure, and obesity.

OUR APPROACH



Wuqu' Kawoq | Maya Health Alliance provides nutrition treatment for 1,500 children a year in dozens of rural communities in Guatemala's Central Highlands. We identify families for the program in consultation with the municipal government local leaders, midwives and other partners.

Although there have been significant efforts to improve the nutrition of Maya children in rural Guatemala over the last several decades, most interventions have had limited impact. **We have developed and tested a ground-breaking approach to successfully improve children's diet in partnership with their caregivers.**

Working with trusted Maya community health workers, we combat child malnutrition through early detection and comprehensive treatment, providing personalized education, regular growth and development monitoring, nutrient supplements, and community classes that include making recipes with local ingredients. We use information technology that enables complex data entry from the field so we can track patient progress and determine which approaches work best.



We also work with government and nonprofit partners to make changes on a systems level and address the root causes of malnutrition. We participate in the [Scaling Up Nutrition](#) (SUN) movement and the [Alliance for Nutrition in Guatemala](#), a network of civil society and private sector organizations advancing national policy around child nutrition. We helped develop [Conectate](#), a national mapping resource for nutrition; and [Nútreme](#), a national ad campaign; and designed a Master Class, Actions that Nourish, to share what we have learned more broadly.

PROGRAMS AND OUTCOMES

Our chronic malnutrition program has achieved unprecedented results. At a community level, we have repeatedly shown that it is possible to reduce rates of chronic malnutrition by 20% to 40% within two to three years.

More importantly, we can show that these reductions in malnutrition are accompanied by large improvements in cognitive outcomes. These programs yield lifelong benefits, enhancing cognition, success in school, and future earnings potential.

In the areas of Patulul, we saw a 39% reduction in malnutrition over two years.

