



**Elizabeth Glaser
Pediatric AIDS Foundation**
Fighting for an AIDS-free generation



EGPAF Cameroon's Advocacy Alongside Key Stakeholders Contributed to Expedited MOH Approval of COVID-19 Guidelines

Since October 2021, the Elizabeth Glaser Pediatric AIDS Foundation (EGPAF), rolled out a COVID-19 initiative funded by FIND and UNITAID, Catalytic COVID-19 Action (CCA) project, to strengthen the public health response to COVID-19 at the national level and in the West, Littoral, and Centre regions. EGPAF Cameroon has carried out robust advocacy efforts, contributing to the Ministry of Health (MOH)'s approval of national guidelines to combat the COVID-19 pandemic. Before the pandemic, MOH approvals and revisions of case management guidelines were done on a yearly basis. However, with the onset of COVID-19, EGPAF was able to work closely with MOH teams and support earlier ad-hoc processes of revision of COVID-19 guidelines for case management for more effective pandemic response especially as the pandemic evolved and a new medication (Tocilizumab) was introduced to treat COVID-19 patients.

Alongside key stakeholders, EGPAF supported the development of revised COVID-19 case management guidelines, which the MOH approved and released in June 2023, just six months after the guidelines were approved by the scientific committee. These guidelines incorporate the latest scientific evidence to include therapeutics to treat COVID-19 and will provide a roadmap for healthcare providers to properly treat COVID-19 patients, ensuring standardized care. This brief explores the key actions that the EGPAF Cameroon took to achieve this success. These actions include:

Trusted and established partnerships with national authorities

EGPAF Cameroon recognizes the importance of establishing trusted partnerships with national authorities and quickly implementing pandemic response initiatives. Furthermore, national authorities recognize EGPAF as an organization with reliable experts and its long-standing history of establishing effective HIV and TB interventions in Cameroon and other countries across Africa. This reputation provides the foundation for trusted partnerships, allowing EGPAF's recommendations to be valued and taken seriously by the MOH to develop innovative interventions to fight against COVID-19.

Proactive Engagement in the Scientific Committee

The scientific committee played a key role in the MOH's approval of the revised COVID-19 guidelines. At the infancy of the pandemic the MOH tasked the scientific committee to provide recommendations and advice to help shape evidence-based policies in the country. The committee consists of renowned scientists, researchers, healthcare professionals, and public health professionals. The MOH recognizes the scientific committee's experience in developing guidelines tailored to the Cameroon context and in accordance with international guidelines, scientific research, and COVID-19 data. EGPAF worked closely with the scientific committee to update the list of drugs to be reviewed based on WHO recommendations and advise when necessary; this collaborative approach was successful, as the scientific committee got all the documentation to get fast track review and endorsement by WHO to strengthen COVID-19 response.

Inclusive and participatory approaches in contributing to the decision making

EGPAF Cameroon fostered a culture of inclusivity that welcomed diverse perspectives in rolling out the revised guidelines. EGPAF emphasized the importance of having all MOH departments and key partners involved in the process to gather all the key information to include in guidelines, which fast-tracked the decision-making process. Also, EGPAF's meetings with the MOH were marked by a shared commitment to the health of Cameroonian people and the importance of effective medication. Setting a mutually agreed-upon goal at the beginning of each meeting allowed the EGPAF Cameroon team to skillfully address the MOH's concerns around selecting new therapeutics, provide clarifications on treatment side effects, and emphasize the urgency of implementing the revised COVID-19 guidelines to support vulnerable populations.

Emphasize the critical importance of continual review of accurate and up-to-date data

From the onset of the pandemic, EGPAF Cameroon collected COVID-19 cascade data via paper tools and entered it into a District Health Information System (DHIS) platform. This data is automatically visualized in a variety of Power BI Dashboards used by the EGPAF team to make decisions and mid-course corrections. Throughout the project EPGAF advocated for the continual collection and review of timely COVID-19 data, and did so in frequent meetings with MOH staff, during which EGPAF shared their COVID-19 data. A month after the WHO's announcement that COVID-19 was no longer a public health emergency, COVID-19 cases spiked in Cameroon, and EGPAF was able to quickly showcase the increase in COVID-19 positive cases in CCA-supported sites to Cameroon's MOH. EGPAF's continual follow-up with MOH staff coupled with continual data collection and review of COVID-19 data proved to be a vital factor in revising COVID-19 guidelines.

Conclusion

EGPAF's efforts, in collaboration with national authorities, played a significant role in safeguarding the health of the Cameroonian people. EGPAF successfully supported the approval Cameroon's revised COVID-19 guidelines through leveraging its trusted and long-standing partnerships, proactive engagement in the scientific committee, inclusivity approach, and data-driven approach. These actions can serve as a blueprint for future pandemic responses, and EGPAF stands as an example of steadfast advocacy in times of crisis.

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