

This Situation Report is jointly issued by PNG National Department of Health and World Health Organization once weekly. This Report is not comprehensive and covers information received as of reporting date.

### Situation Summary and Highlights

- ❑ As of 23 May 2021 (12:00 pm), there have been 15,222 COVID-19 cases including 156 COVID-19 deaths reported in Papua New Guinea. From the period of 17 to 23 May, there were 1017 new cases and 20 new deaths reported.
- ❑ The Secretary General of the PNG Council of Churches is scheduled to receive his vaccine this week and will be a vaccine champion. He has also called on other church leaders to join him.
- ❑ International Emergency Medical Teams (EMTs) continue to provide care for COVID and non-COVID patients in the Highlands and West New Britain.
- ❑ A total of 60 vaccination sites have started vaccinations, out of 182 sites planned to provide COVID-19 vaccinations nationwide.
- ❑ As of 23 May 2021, a total of 23,095 people have been vaccinated in PNG.
- ❑ A team of 2 NDOH and 3 WHO experts visited the AROB from 17 to 21 May to support ongoing COVID-19 response and conduct Rapid Response Team training.

**Table 1. Newly reported COVID-19 cases in PNG<sup>1</sup>**

	New Cases (17 to 23 May 2021)	Cumulative Total
AROB	18	348
Central	9	253
East New Britain	139	1041
East Sepik	5	230
Eastern Highlands	18	625
Enga	14	245
Gulf	16	92
Hela	16	102
Jiwaka	17	140
Madang	37	345
Manus	92	233
Milne Bay	6	136
Morobe	57	1117
National Capital District	85	4998
New Ireland	128	454
Northern (Oro)	0	160
Simbu	3	177
Southern Highlands	25	171
West New Britain	213	630
West Sepik	26	444
Western <sup>2</sup>	2	2379
Western Highlands	91	902
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>1017</b>	<b>15222</b>

<sup>1</sup> As of 23/05/2021, 12:00 pm, PNG time

<sup>2</sup> 2060 cases (87%) from North Fly; 2 cases Middle Fly; 67 cases South Fly; 250 have no district stated

**Note:** Due to additional data cleaning and delay in reporting, provincial case numbers may not add up from last week.

**Table 2. COVID-19 GLOBAL AND REGIONAL UPDATE<sup>2</sup>**

	Confirmed Cases	Deaths
Global	166 346 635	3 449 117
Western Pacific	2 860 945	43 047

<sup>2</sup> WHO COVID-19 Dashboard as of 23/05/2021, 16:45 CEST

### Pillar Updates & Priorities

#### Surveillance:

- ❑ The number of reported cases continue to show a downward trend after the initial peaks seen in March and early May. In the light of surveillance data limitations, additional sources of information is being utilized to ensure that this is the reality on ground.
- ❑ The number of tests conducted in recent weeks continues to decrease, although positivity remains above 20% (Figure 3). There are currently delays in receiving results from provincial and private laboratories. All test results (positive and negative) must be reported to NCC on a weekly basis.
- ❑ COVID-19 related deaths have now been reported in 16 out of 22 provinces. Almost half of the 156 deaths reported to date have been from the National Capital District.

- This week meetings will be held with key NCC staff and international partners providing technical support for modelling and whole genome sequencing. The goal of these meetings is to provide updates on work conducted to date and identify clearer ways forward based on PNG's needs.

#### **Quarantine & Point of Entry:**

- 322 passengers were screened at POE over the last 7 days.
- As of 23 May, there were 487 people under quarantine (PUQ) of which 75 were in home quarantine, 296 in hotels, 89 in company sites and 27 in company apartments.
- There were no reported positive COVID-19 cases in quarantine during this reporting period.
- There are only 3 staff at any given time to monitor PUQ due to unresolved payment of salaries. The team relies on hotel and other facilities staff to support monitoring of PUQ

#### **Laboratory:**

- All equipment for the air laboratory is now in the country but waiting to be cleared and installed. Site inspections and training has been completed.
- The laboratory in Brisbane have increased the number of testing to be conducted on behalf of PNG to cater for those that will be unable to be shipped to Singapore.
- Provincial laboratory managers continue to meet bi-weekly to raise issues and gaps and training needs both in AgRDT and PCR have been identified across the country.
- Papua New Guinea participated and presented at the global Webinar on "SARS-CoV-2 AgRDT Implementation in PNG" on 19 May 2021. It afforded PNG the opportunity to share its experiences on its AgRDT roll out with the global community. The information shared was found valuable and well received
- A revised testing strategy for PNG in the light of current epidemiological trend and testing challenges is being developed
- An SOP for laboratory commodity has been developed to ensure accountability in the use of laboratory commodities and consumables.
- Meeting of bi-weekly provincial laboratory managers took place with major items or gaps identified as workforce and reporting form deficiency which have only line list for RT-PCR and GeneXpert which have greatly affected their reporting of AgRDT. For clinical management reagents will be required for Biochemistry analysers, haematology analysers, microplate readers.
- Semi-automated RNA extraction reagents have been sent to CPHL. This is expected to support fast PCR testing and improve the time around time.

#### **Emergency Medical Teams (EMTs)**

- International Emergency Medical Teams (EMTs) continue to provide care for COVID and non-COVID patients in the Highlands and West New Britain.
- Team Rubicon Bravo team has returned home, and Team Rubicon Charlie team has arrived in PNG on the 21 May. The team will be deploying to Wabag hospital.
- The team is also continuing to support Mt Hagen General Hospital in the Western Highlands, focusing on COVID case management, paediatrics and training. The team has also done some outreach work to district hospitals and clinic and Wabag.
- A 10-person Emergency Medical Team from Heart to Heart International (HHI) arrived in PNG on 9 May and have sent teams to Goroka and West New Britain.

- A team will also be deploying to Jiwaka this week from the team deployed to Goroka. Due to a nurse's strike at the hospital, the team have redeployed to Simbu and outreach to other clinics. In addition, the team have sent 4 members to WNB in response to a call for help due to an increase cases and decreased workforce.

#### **Clinical Management and Infection Prevention and Control:**

- Last week the Clinical Management and IPC team deployed to WNB in response to their request for support.
- The overarching focus of the Clinical Management pillar is on improving basic and critical clinical care and building health system capacity. A concept note for a standardised screening pathway is being developed.
- Most of the teamwork last week was focused on finalising job aids for clinical management and IPC as well as on clarifying the COVID-19 referral pathway in NCD.
- This week the team will focus on providing additional support to West New Britain Province.

#### **Risk Communication & Non-Pharmaceutical Interventions (NPIs):**

- The RCCE Team and the Vaccine Pillar team conducted the national advocacy meeting with national leaders of the Council of Churches in Port Moresby on Friday 22 May. 15 Churches were represented including stakeholders and the meeting received national coverage on EMTV.
- The Secretary General of the PNG Council of Churches has scheduled to receive his vaccine this week and will be a vaccine champion. He has also called on other church leaders to join him.
- A Champions film on the Controller, David Manning, was released in a limited edition on EMTV on 23-24 May on prime time before and after the main news.
- The Cardinal's film also being aired on television with a 60sec version adapted for radio.
- Infographics with his quotes were printed on today' Post Courier and will be published on the National and the Wantok newspapers this week.
- Media personnel and journalists received their vaccines on 23 May and are standing up to 'walk the talk' and be counted.
- There has been a lot of media traction in support of vaccines advocacy including immense support from partners for the Sleeves Up - Be a Vaccine Champion campaign.
- This week the Sleeves Up communication package will be distributed to provinces, and the RCCE will meet to finalise plans for provincial support.
- Risk Communications officers will be travelling to Manus, Gulf, EHP and East Sepik provinces to provide technical support and training of the vaccinators and vaccine advocacy. These provinces have yet to start the vaccination program.

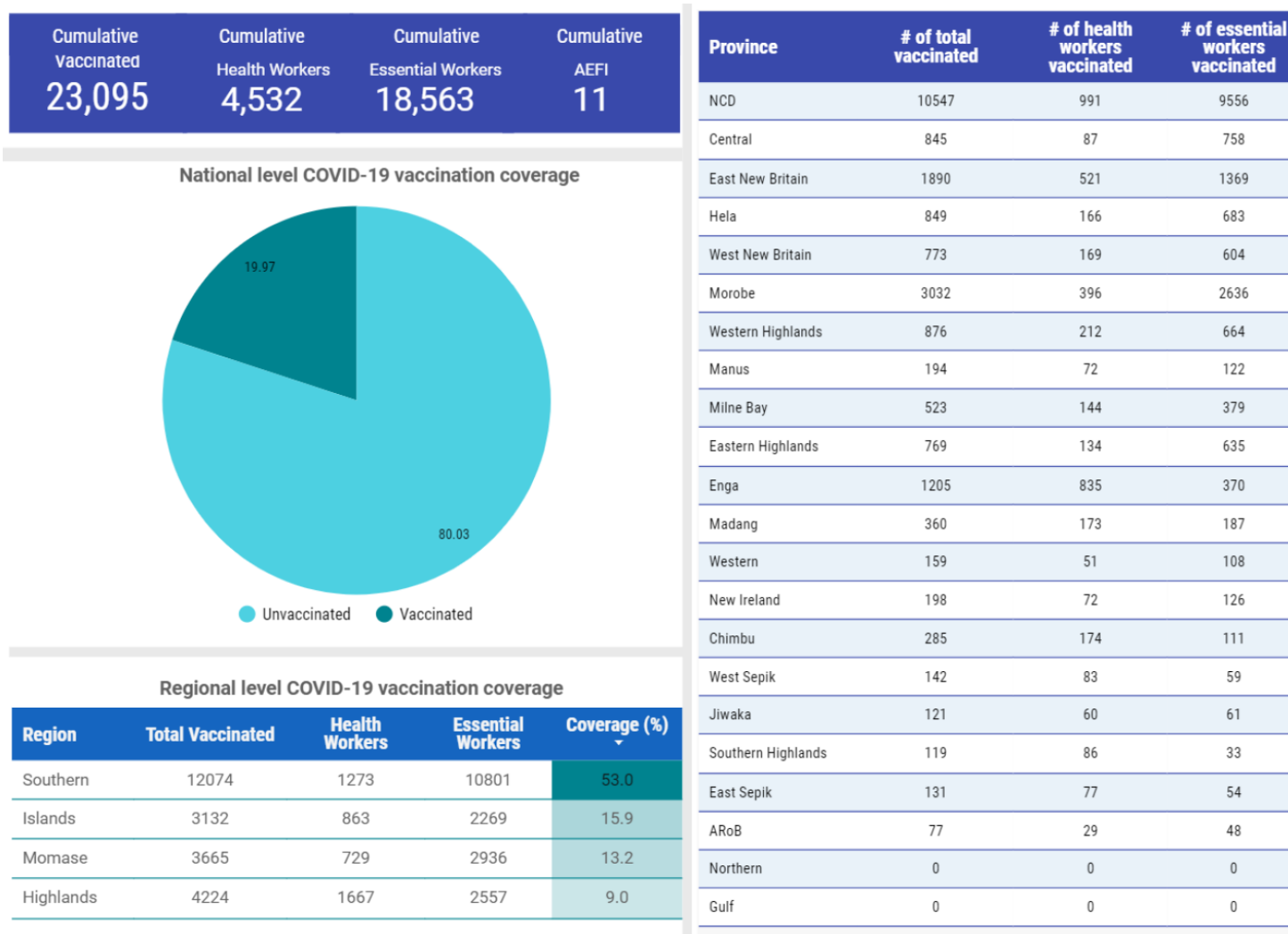
#### **Logistics and Supplies:**

- Most supply dispatches last week were completed via the freight service provided by UNOPS.
- 1.5 tons of COVID 19 supplies were dispatched including PPE, Lab and support materials to Simbu, Southern Highlands, Central, gulf, NCD, Western Highlands, Jiwaka and Madang.
- Supplies were also dispatched to the National Control Centre and the NDoH.
- The team is working with DFAT and the Australian Defence Force to support shipping PPE and tents to Daru by sea as well as airlifting PPE to Kiunga.
- Last week France provided helicopter transport to deliver supplies to Jiwaka.

## National Vaccine Rollout

- ❑ A total of 60 vaccination sites have started vaccinations, out of 182 sites planned to provide COVID-19 vaccinations nationwide.
- ❑ As of 23 May 2021, a total of 23,095 people have been vaccinated in PNG. This includes 5,432 health workers and 18,563 essential workers.
- ❑ The majority of people groups, 7 725 (33%) receiving the vaccination to date are male essential workers between the age of 25-49 years.

**Figure 1. Cumulative number of persons vaccinated by Region and Province**



## National and Provincial Public Health Response

### Support to Autonomous Region of Bougainville (ARoB)

- A team of 2 NDOH and 3 WHO experts visited the ARoB from 17 to 21 May to support ongoing COVID-19 response and conduct training.
- The team met with the ARoB IMT to review and support their operational plans and activities with recommendations to improve overall coordination and on specific response pillars.
- Site visits were conducted to the triage centre, the provincial hospital including laboratory, newly constructed COVID-19 isolation centre and the high School for COVID-19 awareness including advocacy on vaccines.
- The team provided a 2-day training to build and establish a multidisciplinary Rapid Response Team for the AROB. A total of 20 individuals comprising of surveillance officers, laboratory, clinicians including nurses, immunization experts, communication, environmental, logistics, and finance officers were trained.
- The team also provided onsite orientation and education for the faculty of the High School on COVID-19 including advocacy on COVID-19.
- The team observed a noticeable absence of compliance with Niuepla Pasin and that vaccine hesitancy remains high in the region.

### Transmission Assessment

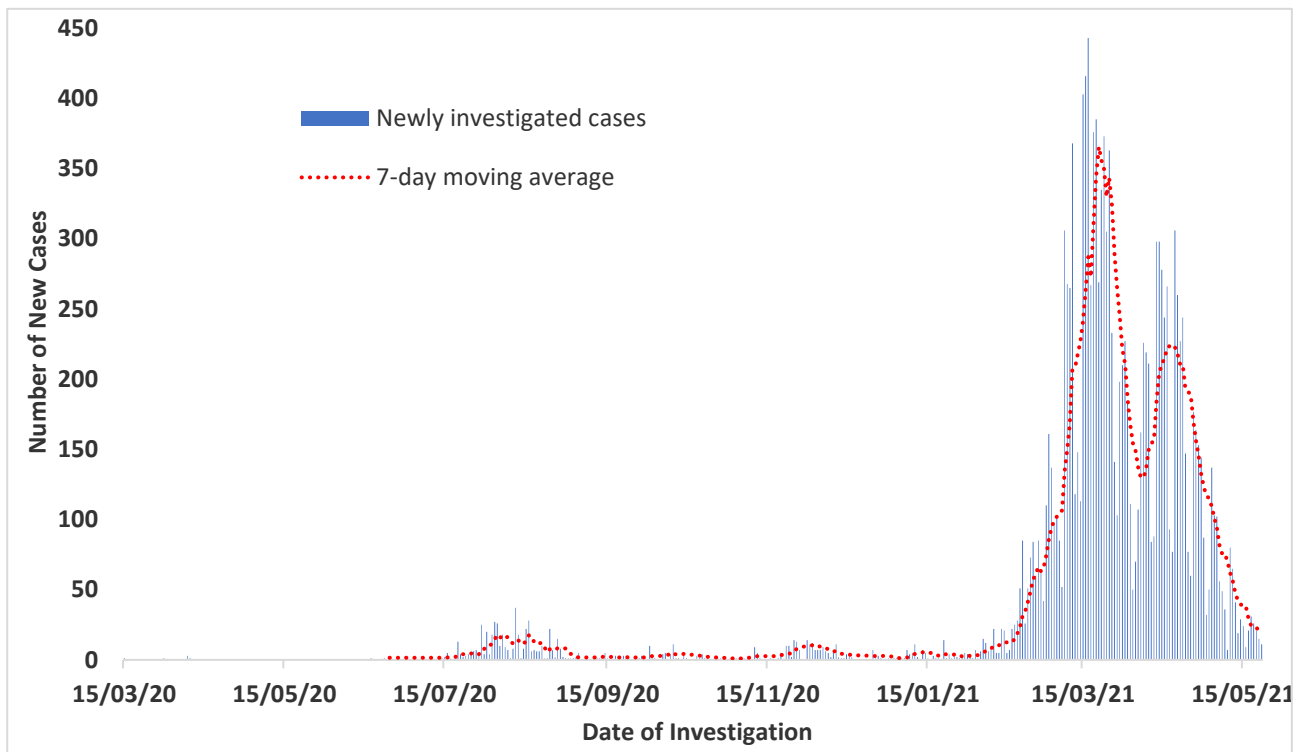
There continues to be COVID-19 cases being reported from across PNG, with 21 of the 22 provinces, including the Autonomous Region of Bougainville (AROB), reporting cases in the previous seven days. During May, there has been a median delay of 21 days between the date a suspected case was swabbed for testing and the date the case is formally reported as positive.

In addition to delays in reporting cases, there continues to be declines in the number of people tested each month. Positivity has remained above 20% since February 2021 and it is believed that community transmission of COVID-19 is occurring in all provinces in PNG. However, access to testing outside of urban centres is also limited, and with low rates of contact tracing, it is difficult to distinguish between which provinces are in stage 2, localised community transmission, and which are in stage 3, widespread community transmission.

More information on the WHO Western Pacific Regional Office COVID-19 transmission stages can be found here: [bit.ly/WPRODashboard](https://bit.ly/WPRODashboard)

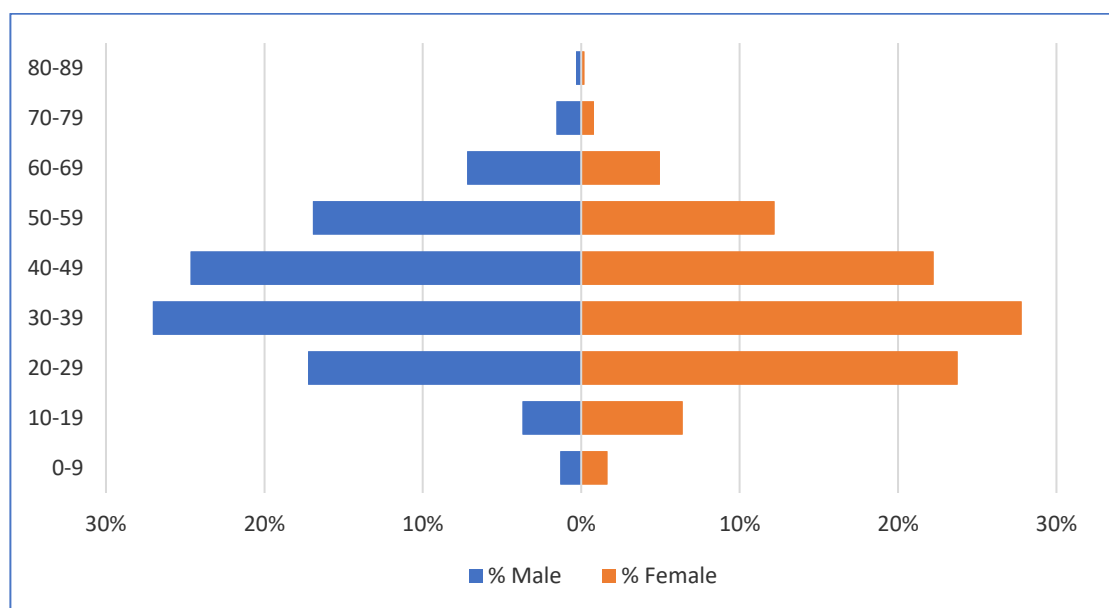
## Epidemiology

**Figure 1. Epidemiological curve of COVID-19 cases in Papua New Guinea, 15 March 2020 to 23 May 2021**

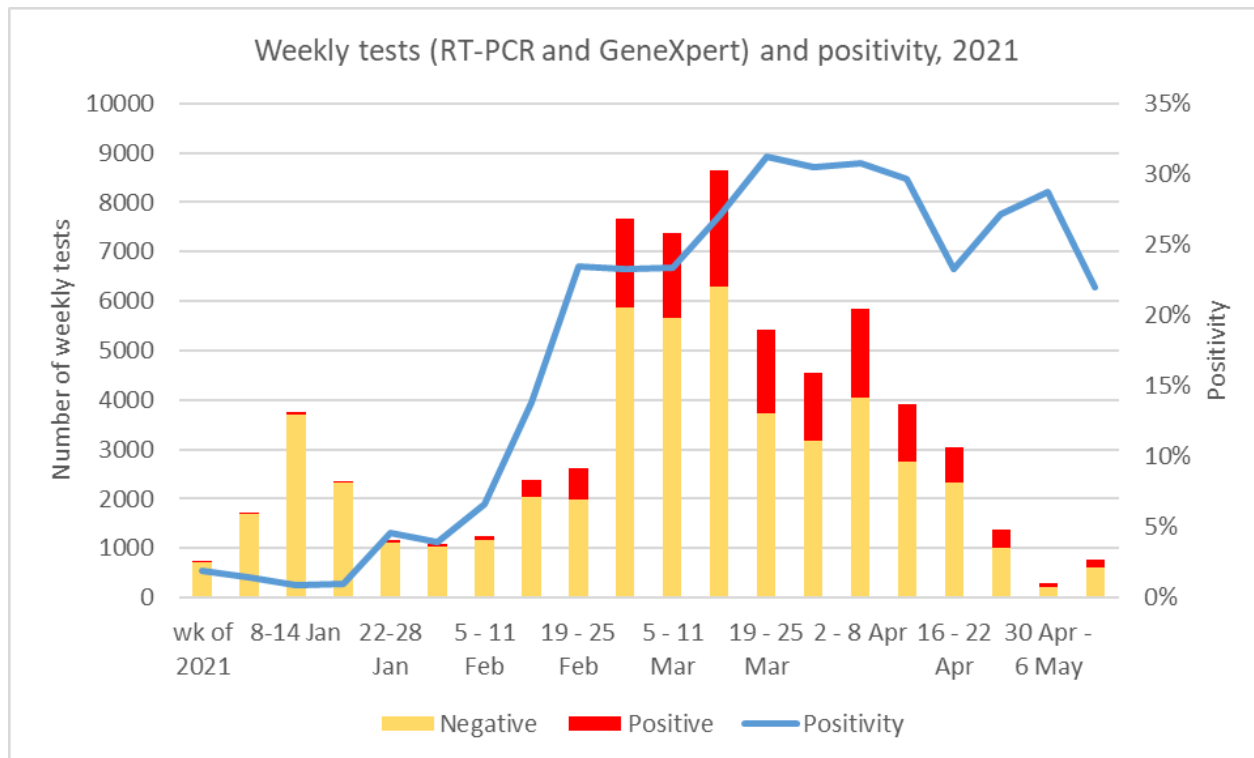


Please note: The true extent of the decreasing trend must be interpreted with caution as there are delays in receiving and reporting results from provinces.

**Figure 2. Percentage age distribution of COVID-19 cases (64% male, n=9471), 15 March 2020 to 23 May 2021**



**Figure 3. Weekly number of RT-PCR and GeneXpert tests and test positivity, 1 January to 24 May 2021**



**\*Please note: This update is based on test results received at the National Control Centre by 24 May 2021.**

**Table 3. Persons Screened by Point of Entry**

Total Number of Travelers Screened before SOE (until 22 March 2020)	29,387	
Total Number of Travelers Screened during SOE (23 March – 16 June 2020)	3,788	
Total Number of Travelers Screened after SOE (17 June 2020 – 22 May 2021)	Air	20,609
	Sea	671
	Land	6
	<b>Total</b>	<b>21,266</b>

**COVID-19 Hotline**

- For the period of 17 May to 23 May, the COVID-19 National Hotline received 4429 calls.
- Of these, 50 (about 1.13%) were health-related calls. 31 of these were referred to the Rapid Response Team/PHA.
- As of 23 May, the hotline had received a total of 238,116 calls. Of these, 6,074 (2.6%) were health-related calls. A total of 2462 calls to date have been referred to Rapid Response Team/PHAs.

## ANNEX A – Photos



Photos 1-2: French Embassy has supported air transportation of supplies to Jiwaka.



Photo 3-4: NDoH & WHO the Autonomous Region of Bougainville.

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