

Puerto Rico Public Health Trust Present After Earthquakes ^[1]

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Responding to its strong community commitment to improve the health of Puerto Rican communities, the Puerto Rico Science, Technology and Research Trust (PRSTRT) along with its program Puerto Rico Public Health Trust (PRPHT) lead a deployment of relief efforts related to the earthquakes of January 2020, which affected several municipalities in the southern area of the Island.

On the very day of January 7th, personnel were activated to organize a quick first aid response as a public organization. The next day, a large group of the Puerto Rico Public Health Trust and the Vector Control Unit arrived in the towns of the southwest to document and know first-hand the needs of the people affected. They are also capitalizing on their alliances with community, public and private entities, as well as non-governmental organizations to provide support.

“We started conducting interviews with community leaders and directly with the victims to know the real needs of those affected. We identified that the most pressing needs were to establish mental health programs, distribute educational and preventive material in health and epidemiological measures; and offer preventive talks to prevent the spread of diseases caused by the *Aedes aegypti* mosquito carrying dengue, zika and chikungunya”, explained Lucy Crespo, CEO of the Puerto Rico Science, Technology and Research Trust.

The Puerto Rico Public Health Trust has joined with Americares, in this effort and began strengthening the mental health of employees and community leaders so they can help others. In the same way, the Trust has included the reading of the book "The Day Everything Moved", so

that children understand in a simple way what happens in an earthquake. This activity is accompanied by a book of activities, alluding to the story, so that children can express, either by drawing or in words, how they felt on the day the earthquake occurred.

Book

Recognizing the uncertainty that impacts childhood and as part of the occasion of National Hug Day, PRPHT staff visited shelters in Guánica and Peñuelas impacting hundreds of children with the reading of the book "The Day Everything Moved." Together with local celebrities, the children were oriented on the nature of the earthquakes, as well as the appropriate response at the time of the phenomena. A total of 150 books and a total of 100 solar lamps were delivered in the communities.

Vector Control Unit

The Vector Control Unit managed an alliance with *Las Tres Mosquiteras* to make mosquito nets viable. The Trust proceeded with the first purchase of materials to make the first 300 mosquito nets and logistics support will be provided for delivery. Now, 7,000 mosquito repellents have been delivered to those affected in the south. With the collaboration of entities such as Hispanic Federation, Municipality of Ponce, Puerto Rico Renace, among others, the team is also taking educational and recreational activities to children in shelters such as reading the Book of the Mosquito, dances, paintings, etc. In addition, mosquito traps have been placed - 80 in Yauco and 80 in Ponce - to identify the types of mosquitoes that are affecting these communities and to determine recommendations on appropriate control methods. Among the most common species are *Aedes aegypti*, *Aedes taeniorhynchus* and *Culex quinquefasciatus* being *Aedes aegypti* the one that more diseases spreads with the increase in rains in the region.

The Puerto Rico Public Health Trust is a 501 (c) (3), and in 2017 it was designated by the Puerto Rico Legislature as the Puerto Rico Public Health Institute to work in partnership with multiple sectors, including government agencies, communities, the health care delivery system, companies, media and academia. For more information on their efforts or to require assistance in communities with public health issues visit www.prsciencetrust.org [2] or call 787-523-1592.

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