

Youth**Action**Net®

CASE STUDY SERIES

Guimedic:

*BRIDGING MEDICAL
ACCESSIBILITY IN MEXICO*

A partnership between:



GEORGETOWN UNIVERSITY
School of Foreign Service
Global Human Development Program



Introduction

This is one of a series of case studies produced by students enrolled in the Global Human Development Program at Georgetown University through its partnership with the International Youth Foundation. Students enrolled in a course exploring the role of social enterprises and social entrepreneurs were paired with young leaders of social ventures identified through the IYF's YouthActionNet® program. The students were given the assignment of analyzing the venture's assets, successful methodologies, and opportunities for investment to increase impact. Through this experiential learning process, the student consultants gained hands-on experience and exposure to the needs of social enterprises. The ventures, too, benefited from student insights into their strengths, areas for growth, and recommendations for enhancing their impact and sustainability. The Georgetown practicum is part of YouthActionNet's larger efforts to partner with institutions of higher learning around the globe to integrate social change into the academic experience and career interests of students.

International Youth Foundation

The International Youth Foundation (IYF) invests in the extraordinary potential of young people. Founded in 1990, IYF builds and maintains a worldwide community of businesses, governments, and civil society organizations committed to empowering youth to be healthy, productive, and engaged citizens. IYF programs are catalysts of change that help young people obtain a quality education, gain employability skills, make healthy choices, and improve their communities.

www.iyfnet.org

YouthActionNet®

Since 2001, YouthActionNet, a program of the International Youth Foundation, has provided founders of social ventures, ages 18 to 29, with the training, networking, coaching, funding, and advocacy opportunities they need to strengthen and scale their impact. These young social entrepreneurs have pioneered innovative solutions to critical local and global challenges, resulting in increased civic engagement, improved health, education reform, economic opportunity, environmental protection, and more inclusive societies. Our work is carried out through a network of 23 national and regional youth leadership institutes that collectively support over 1,350 young social entrepreneurs globally.

www.youthactionnet.org

Global Human Development Program at Georgetown University

The Global Human Development Program of Georgetown University is home to one of the world's premier master's degree programs in international development. An innovative, academically rigorous skills-based graduate program, the Master of Global Human Development degree prepares the next generation of development professionals to work with public sector agencies, private businesses, and non-profit organizations that advance development. Through coursework, extracurricular activity, and practical fieldwork experiences, our graduates develop the insights, skills, and experiences necessary to become leaders in development and make a difference in our global community.

<https://ghd.georgetown.edu>

INTRODUCTION

Meet Dr. Carolina Zuheil Candelario, CEO of Guimedic

At the age of 21, Carolina Zuheil Candelario decided to spend a year volunteering as a physician in a remote village outside of Jalisco, Mexico—an undertaking that would challenge her both personally and professionally. Within her first week, she watched helplessly as a newborn died in its mother’s arms, doomed by a lack of basic medical supplies that could have saved the child’s life. Profoundly affected by this experience, Dr. Zuheil has dedicated her career to improving the lives of those who have traditionally lacked access to adequate healthcare in Mexico.



In 2011, Dr. Zuheil launched Guimedic, a non-profit that brings medically trained volunteers to the most remote and impoverished communities of Mexico. Its mobile clinics provide high-quality medical treatment to populations that would otherwise be isolated from care. Since its inception, Guimedic has served over 55,000 people and has a network of more than 1,200 volunteers. Guimedic also provides basic health services to poor families in urban areas and advocates for healthcare policy reform that will improve medical accessibility to rural populations. Dr. Zuheil is passionate about providing equitable medical services to Mexico’s most marginalized populations and continues to inspire her fellow medical peers to share her vision.

Guimedic is providing medical attention to the most marginalized and excluded populations in Mexico.



The Problem

About half of the population of Mexico—62 million people—lives below the national poverty line.¹ While many people in the country struggle with issues of poverty, poor Mexicans living in rural communities face a unique set of challenges to leading healthy lives. Many rural communities have limited access to basic medical services and as of 2016, about 13% of such communities did not have any access to healthcare services. Additionally, the current healthcare model is inadequately funded, and is thus unable to meet the needs of the nation’s most marginalized citizens. Limited access to medical services in these remote regions exacerbates health disparities for members of those communities including, frequently, premature death from otherwise preventable causes. Even in such cases, many of these deaths are not accounted for by the state, as the people in these communities often lack legal documentation.

Furthermore, many indigenous patients experience discrimination at local clinics or report receiving poor quality service. Considering the remote location of these communities and their residents’

¹ [World Bank Country Poverty Brief: Mexico](#)

frequent lack of documentation, the number of Mexican citizens who cannot seek medical attention is almost certainly higher than what is nationally reported. To address these issues, Guimedic seeks to not only deliver medical services to the most marginalized and impoverished communities in Mexico, but also aims to engage in local public advocacy to help create a more inclusive Mexican public health system on the highest levels.

“Guimedic fights all diseases, including inequality.”

Strategic Plan (2018-2023)

The Solution

Guimedic reaches Mexico’s most remote communities with its mobile clinics, which are staffed by doctors and medical student volunteers. Mobile clinics are an important and effective means of service delivery as most of the communities Guimedic serves are located more than two hours away from the nearest medical facility. Guimedic focuses on serving regions where the population is classified by the National Council for the Evaluation of Social Development Policy (CONEVAL) as living in poor or extremely poor conditions.² The majority of these regions are composed of local indigenous communities such as the Huicholes, Coras, and Tzotzils. Guimedic currently operates in the states of Sonora, Nayarit, Jalisco, Michoacán, and Chiapas. In order to reach isolated communities, Guimedic uses a variety of transportation methods which include aerial, maritime, and terrestrial travel.



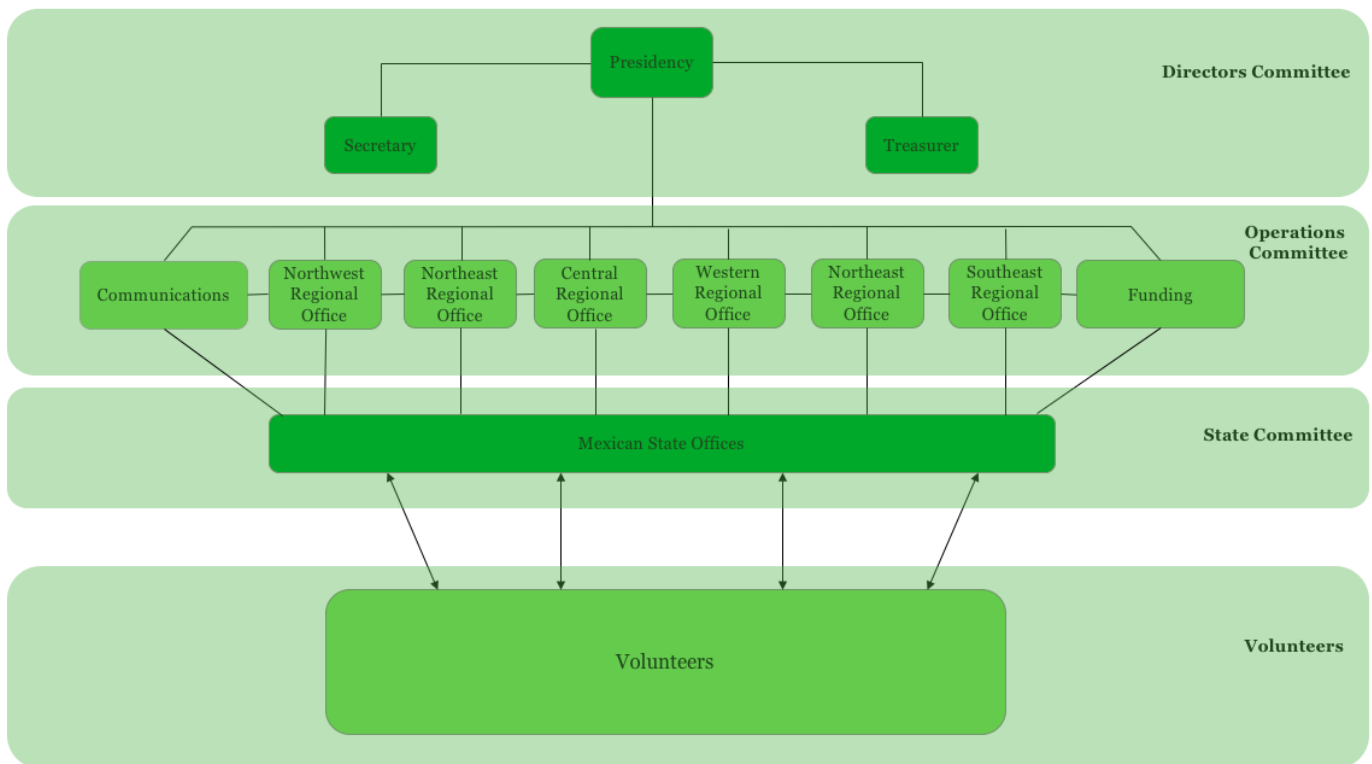
Guimedic’s success is made possible by the eagerness and passion of its volunteers. For many volunteers, working with Guimedic enables them to gain hands-on experience and put medical theory into practice—a valuable benefit for medical students, who comprise a significant portion of Guimedic’s volunteer base. The organization also relies on donations and partnerships with pharmaceutical companies and nonprofits to meet the medical needs of its beneficiaries. Guimedic hopes to expand into Southern Mexico and work in the states of Yucatan, Guerrero, and Veracruz in the future.

² [CONEVAL Level of Poverty](#)

OPERATIONAL MODEL

Guimedic is a registered nonprofit organization in Mexico. Headed by Dr. Carolina Zuheil Candelario, the team consists of full-time staff and volunteers. The full-time staff includes a president, secretary, treasurer, operational committee, communications department, and state coordinators. Guimedic's main offices are based out of Jalisco, but local offices have autonomy to decide which communities or vulnerable populations they will work with based on the available CONEVAL data. At the heart of the organization's model is a reliance on the expertise of Guimedic's full-time staff and committed network of volunteers.

Image: Guimedic's organizational structure. Provided by Guimedic.



Guimedic's mission is to bring health services to Mexico's most marginalized and vulnerable communities. Accordingly, the organization's effectiveness hinges on its ability to identify those vulnerable, rural communities most in need of modern medical services and equipment. The organization uses data from CONEVAL to identify states with the highest levels of poverty and where residents have the greatest barriers to accessing health services. After identifying a geographical region, Guimedic deploys an evaluation team consisting of an epidemiologist, physician, rescuer, nurse, and public health practitioner to conduct an initial assessment of the community. The evaluation assessment consists of, first, meeting with local leaders to establish a working relationship between Guimedic staff and the community and, second, gaining permission to deliver medical services to the population. Upon establishing this relationship, the evaluation team conducts an initial health assessment of the community in order to determine what medical equipment, medications, and staff will be needed.

Depending on the geographic location and initial medical needs assessment, about 10 to 20 medical volunteers and staff travel to these remote communities to provide medical services.

On average, Guimedic treats 1,372 patients each month. As of early 2018, Guimedic has a network of 1,100 foreign volunteers (60% are from the United States, 12% from Puerto Rico, and 10% from Honduras) and 800 domestic volunteers (50% from Jalisco, 20% from Michoacán, 13% from Chiapas, 10% from Nayarit). To recruit volunteers, Guimedic partners with local universities, especially those with medical or health care programs. Once accepted, each volunteer goes through an extensive training process, including courses in first aid, search and rescue, and firefighting and safety.

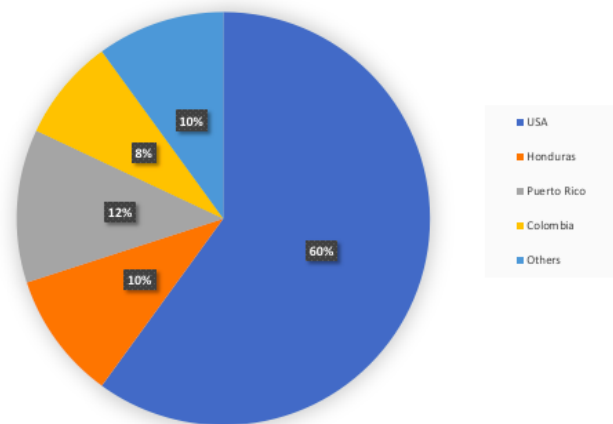
Volunteers are also required to attend a variety of lectures on other topics related to Guimedic's work.

Guimedic sees this investment in volunteers as a win-win situation for both the organization and the volunteers. The majority of international volunteers, for example, are prohibited from treating patients in their home countries until they become certified physicians—so by volunteering with Guimedic, they have a unique opportunity to strengthen their clinical skills, while providing much-needed care to vulnerable populations. Volunteers then bring back clinical experience to their home countries, creating a cycle of knowledge sharing.

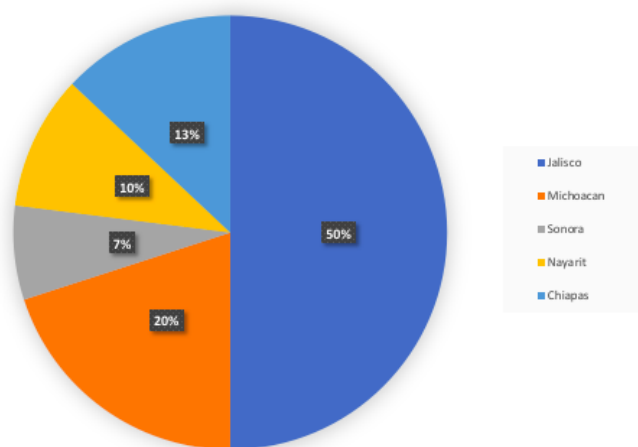
Guimedic conducts follow-up visits in each community every two-to-three weeks following an intervention, with the duration of the visit depending on community needs. During these follow-up visits, Guimedic not only provides further medical treatment to patients, but also empowers local communities through public health education. By teaching essential health information like hygiene and sexual education, and providing patients with the necessary knowledge, Guimedic aims to provide communities with the tools to stay healthy in the long term.

It costs 2,100 pesos to transport, feed, equip, and train each volunteer.³ To support this cost, Guimedic volunteers cover 50% of their individual expenses. This volunteer contribution is a significant backbone of Guimedic's operational support. Additionally, Guimedic depends on

Foreign Volunteers (2018)



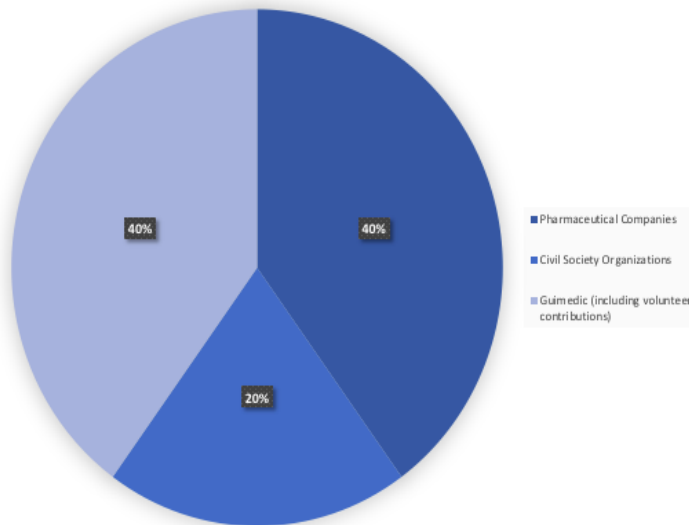
Mexican Volunteers (2018)



³ On March 26, 2018 this was about \$114.85.

donations from local businesses, development organizations, and local governments. These non-volunteer donations serve primarily to cover the costs of capacity building and organizational infrastructure. One concern regarding this funding model is the potential of a toxic political climate or hostile economic conditions to ascend, ultimately limiting the pool of future volunteers, and thereby limiting Guimedec's ability to execute on its mission.

Guimedec Donations Breakdown (2018)



Guimedec also relies on donations of needed medications. 40% of Guimedec's donated medications are supplied by pharmaceutical companies, and another 20% arrive from civil society organizations. Guimedec purchases the remaining 40%. Although Guimedec receives consistent donations to meet its operational needs, the organization would benefit from expanding its network of medical practitioners to include specialists, such as dentists. Furthermore, the organization lacks consistent access to more expensive medical equipment, like sonograms, which would be particularly beneficial to its target populations.

KEY ASSETS & SUCCESSFUL METHODOLOGIES

Mobile Clinics

Guimedec delivers medical services to remote and isolated populations in Mexico. The organization invests in the communities it serves by developing relationships, staying for extended periods of time to provide adequate care, and conducting follow-up visits every two-to-three weeks. Guimedec delivers medical care by way of its mobile clinics, or teams of medical professionals and volunteers who travel to remote communities to provide treatment and prescribe medications. Guimedec is currently the only organization in Mexico employing this innovative model. As a result, its staff and volunteers are some of the only medical professionals in the country that are able to provide healthcare services to remote and indigenous communities on a regular basis.

Gender Equity Lens

The majority of medical staff and volunteers at Guimedec are women. This is an asset for the organization given that many indigenous communities are uncomfortable with male health care practitioners providing medical attention to female patients. Furthermore, as Guimedec treats many gender-related problems in the communities it serves, it is critical that its volunteers can quickly develop trust with female patients. Teenage pregnancy is a prevalent issue in many of the remote communities in which Guimedec works. In response, in addition to providing health services, Guimedec also focuses on delivering family planning education.

Local Ecosystems

Guimedica influences local ecosystems in two ways. The first is by tapping its pools of local donors, including civil society organizations, volunteers, large companies, and local governments, all of which allow the organization to raise public awareness on healthcare disparities in Mexico. The second is by empowering local communities to take healthcare into their own hands. Guimedica does this not only by providing direct medical attention to patients, but also by teaching the importance of hygiene and family planning. A key long-term goal for Guimedica is that healthcare will one day be considered a human right within Mexico.

CONCLUSION

Guimedica is a pioneer in the transformation of Mexico's public healthcare system. Guimedica takes a holistic approach to health services delivery in Mexico, and the cornerstones of its activities are its mobile clinics, passionate volunteers, community investment, and commitment to public advocacy. Without Guimedica, thousands of indigenous communities would remain excluded from accessing basic health services and continue being invisible due to their legal documentation status.

FURTHER INFORMATION ABOUT GUIMEDICA

- [Guimedica Facebook Page](#)
- [Twitter: @Guimedica](#)
- [Guimedica YouTube Channel](#)
- [YouthActionNet Fellow Profile of Carolina Zuheil Candelario](#)
- Award: [Here for Good](#)-Laureate International Universities
- Video: [Providing Mobile Medical Care in Rural Mexico](#) with Fellow Carolina Candelario
- Blog: [5 Young Leaders Who Made Me a Believer in the SDGs](#)
- [Guimedica Website](#) (under construction)

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