

# PARTNER EVENTS AND NEWS

## Learning from HEARTS in the Americas

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The Global HEARTS initiative was launched in 2016 by the World Health Organization and United States CDC to improve the heart health of people globally. The HEARTS technical package is a central initiative that guides implementation of standardised cardiovascular disease risk reduction strategies in primary care.<sup>1</sup>

HEARTS in the Americas is a large regional adaptation of the Global HEARTS initiative that is supported by the Pan American Health Organization.

In June I had the privilege of joining the HEARTS in Mexico and HEARTS in the Americas teams for a two-day quality improvement workshop in Merida, Yucatan, and visits to three primary care centres. Because my expertise is largely blood pressure measurement, I was excited to see how the primary care centres have implemented the use of validated automated blood pressure devices and standardized measurement processes – as recommended by the HEARTS in the Americas clinical pathway.<sup>2</sup> But I was also keen to learn about aspects of the HEARTS program that I was less familiar with, and to gain firsthand understanding of the importance of local context for adapting HEARTS to ensure it is effective on the ground.

So, what did I learn? Much more than anticipated!

From the quality improvement workshop, it was a unique insight into the critical need for effort at a grassroots level for successful implementation. Everyone in the room was highly motivated to improve health outcomes for their community, it was very uplifting and positive. The workshop was designed to 'train-the-trainer' and had a mix

of standardized lectures and practical learning activities.

A highlight was the overview of the experience of HEARTS in Yucatan state presented by Mtra. Ileana Fajardo – showing their major progress to implement HEARTS. In 2020, 13 primary care units had implemented HEARTS, and by 2023, this had risen to 140 units, which is all primary care units in the state. The presentation showed a substantial, coordinated effort and team work to achieve this goal. Critically, they are closely tracking the maturity of the implementation of HEARTS to monitor and report on success and identify units which need more support. To support their local implementation efforts, Yucatan have taken the standardized HEARTS in the Americas clinical pathway and renamed it "Cuida tu Corazon" or 'Take Care of Your Heart' and importantly, developed resources in both Spanish and the local Mayan language.<sup>3</sup>

During the primary care centre visits, I was on the lookout for validated, automated blood pressure devices....and they were everywhere we went! The centre nurses were responsible for undertaking the measurement and the clinical pathway document, including the steps to achieve standardized, accurate readings was displayed prominently. But I learned much more beyond observing the blood pressure measurement process.

The HEARTS in the Americas clinical pathway is clear, if high blood pressure is identified, treatment begins. There was a lot of discussion about avoiding treatment inertia. Indeed, there was a pharmacy within the primary care centres so that anti-hypertensives can be taken home

immediately – this is quite different to Australia. Patients identified with high blood pressure have monthly checks and where necessary up titration, until control is achieved. There are challenges though. Access to certain medications that other regions may take for granted, and access to and cost of validated automated devices. Overcoming these challenges will require ongoing advocacy.

High blood pressure control rates remain poor in most corners of the world.<sup>3</sup> We can all learn from each other to implement best practice, evidence-based health care that delivers for patients. I was privileged to learn from the HEARTS in Mexico and HEARTS in the Americas teams firsthand, but there are also many resources available should readers wish to gain insights.<sup>4-6</sup>

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## References

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