



VHC Medical Brigade

# IMPACT

# REPORT

2022

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# FROM THE BOARD CHAIR

**Dear Friends,**

The year 2022 was an exciting one for VHC Medical Brigade, marked by significant progress and new accomplishments despite the ongoing impact of the COVID-19 pandemic. With a combination of new team members and experienced volunteers, our programs flourished and extended their reach through innovative partnerships. The most rewarding aspect of our work was witnessing the transformative impact that our efforts had on the lives of the beneficiaries we serve.



Mark Kerrigan, Board Chair

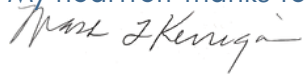
In early 2022, we were able to expand our operations in Honduras and increase our international technical support as COVID restrictions were reduced. Our team completed our largest-ever clean water project, which included laying over 7 kilometers of piping, installing pressure breaks, and building reservoirs to bring clean water to the homes of more than 600 people. Our staff in Honduras played a crucial role in helping schools reopen successfully after almost two years of closure, providing school meals and health and hygiene training to students. We also resumed medical training for community health workers, doctors, nurses, and firefighters. In spite of the difficulties caused by the pandemic, our amazing community health workers remained committed to serving their communities, with many having volunteered for over 11 years - a rare achievement in volunteer mobilization. Trainings for water boards and community health boards continued to strengthen our collaboration with various government, medical, and educational partners. Overall, these efforts helped equip Hondurans with the tools they need to meet the challenges faced by their communities.

In the fall, we achieved a significant milestone as our flagship International Surgical Trip was a resounding success, with our team of 51 medical experts performing the highest number of surgeries in our history. Our patients were immensely grateful, especially since many hospitals had postponed surgical procedures during the pandemic, leaving patients across the country in dire need and creating the largest backlog of surgical services since our organization was founded. We also provided invaluable support to our partners in Honduras by sending over \$93,000 worth of supplies and equipment, helping them to replenish their depleted stock of supplies and equip their overstretched facilities.

It was a great honor for me to assume the role of Board Chair following Dr. J.J. Sverha's successful two-year tenure, and we are delighted to have welcomed our new Executive Director, Aaron Moore, who brings with him 18 years of valuable experience in international development experience, leading nonprofit organizations in places like Afghanistan, Iraq, and Mexico.

The many achievements we saw in 2022 would not have been possible without the generous support of our incredible donors, who contributed their time and resources. Although we faced a challenging funding situation early in the year, we were heartened by the generosity of many donors who stepped up to the challenge, increasing their support, and inspiring their friends and family to join us in our mission. Funding remains tight but, thanks to the unwavering commitment of our donors, we continue to make a positive impact in the lives of the people of Honduras, providing them with empowerment, health, and opportunity.

My heartfelt thanks to you all.

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Mark Kerrigan".

Mark Kerrigan,  
Board Chair  
VHC Medical Brigade

# INTRODUCTION

**VHC Medical Brigade has been working since 1999 to bring transformational health and development to the most vulnerable in Honduras.**

We are a health and development non-government organization empowering communities to solve their challenges.

We help invest in health, nutrition, clean water, and education in rural areas. We also provide surgical services and build the capacity of the Honduran medical system. Sustainability and local ownership are integral to everything we do.

## **Our Focus on Honduras**

We focus on Honduras because it is one of the least developed and economically disparate countries in the Western Hemisphere. The country faces a range of challenges, including political instability, high levels of inequality, natural disasters, and the lingering impact of the COVID-19 pandemic. According to the 2023 UN Needs Overview, over 59% of Hondurans live in poverty, with over 32% living in extreme poverty.<sup>1(p8)</sup> The overstretched health system in the region and lack of basic services are among the many reasons around 36,000<sup>5</sup> people feel the need to leave Honduras each year.



Our development efforts serve rural mountain communities that rely on subsistence agriculture and face increasing poverty and slower development compared to urban areas. Similarly, our medical services are exclusively available to low-income patients who lack access to essential health services, helping to bridge the urban-rural healthcare access gap in Honduras.

## **Our Approach**

Our strategy to achieve our goals is designed around local needs. While our ultimate objectives are consistent and our program approaches are meticulously designed by technical experts, our projects on the ground are adjusted to meet the changing needs of our beneficiaries, communities, and partners. This has been particularly important in light of the new normal post the COVID-19 pandemic, the effects of climate change on mountain landscapes, and the political changes in Honduras.

# OUR STORY SO FAR

## OUR WORK

VHC Medical Brigade (lovingly known as "the Brigade") was founded as a volunteer organization. We have a small staff and team, however, most of our work is still performed by an impressive cadre of volunteers. The US-based volunteer team includes doctors, nurses, and other professionals who donate their world-class expertise to the cause. Within Honduras, we have a variety of volunteer partners, ranging from community health workers to community water board members, medical equipment engineers, and other specialized experts.

As the Brigade has grown, we have made a conscious effort to maintain a small staff team, maximize the impact of volunteers, and re-purpose donated medical goods to reduce costs. This approach has allowed us to maximize the impact of donor dollars and achieve greater effectiveness in our programs. In fact, we are well-recognized among charities for our high impact, transparency, and quality.

## OUR PROGRAMS

The Brigade has two primary programs, the Rural Development Program and the International Medical Program. Each program is comprised of multiple projects which all contribute collectively to our three objectives and our cross-cutting theme. These objectives are aligned with the Honduran Government's objectives and the global Sustainable Development Goals.

## OUR RATINGS

VHC Medical Brigade has earned a Four-Star rating from Charity Navigator and a Platinum Transparency award from Candid, two of the largest independent charity evaluators in the United States.



# OUR RURAL DEVELOPMENT PROGRAM

The Rural Development Program provides vital assistance to some of the most underdeveloped communities in the country, where subsistence agriculture, mainly coffee farming, is the primary source of income.

Our program works with these communities to identify and address their pressing needs, with a focus on healthcare, clean water, education, and nutrition. Across all of the projects, we ensure care and empowerment for the most vulnerable, particularly women and girls.

Our Rural Development Program has four key objectives:

- To ensure access to healthcare for the most vulnerable.
- To train and equip health professionals & volunteers.
- To empower communities to provide basic services independently.
- To promote the health and empowerment of women and girls.







# RURAL CLINICS

## The Need

Access to medical care in rural Honduran communities is a significant challenge due to the lack of basic healthcare services. With only .5 physicians per 1,000 people,<sup>2</sup> the lack of medical professionals in Honduras is on par with many of the least developed countries in the world.

Additionally, Honduras faces a tragically high maternal mortality rate, which the UN estimated to have doubled from 2020 to 2021, with 125 maternal deaths per 100,000 live births.<sup>1 (p75)</sup> Honduras has a teenage pregnancy rate double the global average.<sup>1 (p65)</sup> This causes higher rates of pregnancy complications, low birth weight, and significantly increased infant mortality.

Most Honduran health professionals seek work in cities, creating an even bigger healthcare gap for rural Honduran communities. The nearest healthcare facilities for the communities we serve are located two to four hours away by foot, which is often insurmountable for sick patients, the elderly, and pregnant or new mothers.



## Our Approach

The rural health project increases access to healthcare by building rural clinics and deploying trained Community Health Workers (CHWs), who are in turn equipped with the needed medicines and supplies to meet basic health needs. CHWs volunteer their time to learn how to provide primary care, diagnose and treat basic illnesses, and confirm when further medical attention is necessary.



CHWs help mitigate the need for seeking treatment outside of the community by treating some of these most basic health concerns. Some examples of treatments include prescribing antibiotics when necessary for upper respiratory infections or urinary tract infections, nebulization treatment for respiratory ailments such as asthma, and providing much-needed prenatal vitamins to expectant mothers who frequently lack access to proper nutrition during pregnancy and beyond.

In May of 2022, the Brigade resumed our training after a pause for the pandemic. On returning, we found that our team of volunteers remains engaged and as ready as ever to continue learning and serving in even greater ways.

We also observed superb examples of increased community awareness of preventative health, as a result of the community health workers sharing guidance with mothers and other community members. The rural health project, combined with the impact of our clean water project, has resulted in a drastic reduction in incidences of preventable and easily treatable illnesses, including diarrheal cases across the communities our clinics serve.

Community members consistently expressed strong appreciation for the willingness of CHWs to go above and beyond to help patients in the most challenging situations, including accompanying sick patients to the hospital.

The overall impact of the rural health project is not just better health and reduced suffering, but also renewed community trust, and empowered women and men, who now have the solutions and experience to help solve their community's challenges.

At our rural health clinic in Veracruz, a young mother came in needing urgent care for her daughter. Struggling to breathe, the three-year-old was immediately examined by Tomasita, who volunteers as a CHW at the clinic.

The child was found to be suffering from pneumonia, requiring a nebulizer to stabilize her breathing so that she could be transported to Comayagua for immediate hospitalization.

Scan the QR code below to see how Tomasita's response was crucial in this life-threatening emergency.



# RURAL SCHOOLS

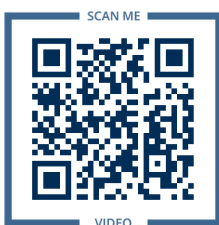
## The Need

Rural mountain villages in Honduras require assistance to guarantee the health and education of their children.

Our organization has helped these communities by establishing rural clinics and access to clean water. These efforts are a partnership with the leadership of affected communities, where families are eager to provide their children with better health, hygiene, education, and nutrition.

The United Nations has reported that families across Latin America are struggling to afford basic necessities like food. This is leading to poor health, malnutrition, and desperation, forcing many to migrate out of the country. Over 3.2 million people in Honduras are expected to face a food insecurity crisis or emergency this year.<sup>3</sup>

In the poorest communities, up to 40% of children suffer from stunted growth due to malnutrition.<sup>4</sup>



**40 %**  
of **children** in  
Honduras don't  
go to **school.**

FEREMA

In rural areas, children are also at risk of parasitic infections, which can cause chronic malnutrition, fatigue, and reduced nutrient intake.

The state of education in rural areas is equally concerning, with illiteracy rates reaching as high as 27%. This rate is even worse for women, with 47% having no secondary education.<sup>1(p16)</sup>

Moreover, Honduras has a staggeringly high adolescent dropout rate at an estimated 55% in 2022, far above the regional average of 9%.<sup>1(p26)</sup>

For rural mountain communities that rely solely on subsistence agriculture, education is often overlooked, as children are needed to help with crop harvesting.

According to the Ministry of Education, 1.2 million children and adolescents (40% of the school-age population) do not attend school at all.<sup>6</sup>

## Our Approach

The Brigade works with schools to provide preventative health programming, beginning with a full regimen of anti-parasite (deworming) medicines. We also provide clean water supplies to the schools (as well as surrounding communities), reducing the risk of bacterial, fungal, and parasitic infections. In addition to the prevented pain and discomfort, parasite-free children miss less school.

Brigade staff and volunteers visit the schools to deliver classes on basic hygiene concepts and behaviors. These lessons, performed in schools with the active support of school administration, include lectures, short videos on projectors, and demonstrations. These lessons, from theory to practice, build positive hygienic behaviors which reduce disease and improve dental health. To catalyze the adoption of these hygiene practices, each student receives a hygiene kit, with some basic hygiene supplies.



The project provides health and education support for children in 10 rural mountain communities, reaching 735 students, including 395 boys and 340 girls, in the school year from February – December 2022. This follows a small drop in school attendance following the pandemic, with the Brigade planning additional outreach to communities to encourage school attendance in 2023.

The Brigade also provided 88,000 meals, prepared by volunteer parents, to 440 students (243 boys and 197 girls) in five of the lowest-income schools. The hot school lunch for every student every school day in those schools helps because school meals do more than just provide critical nourishment to children; it also improves academic performance, reduces sickness, and provides an incentive for children to attend every day- that's potentially life-changing for the child.

# CLEAN WATER

## The Need

The problem of inadequate access to clean drinking water is particularly severe in rural Honduras compared to urban areas of the country.<sup>8</sup> However, as noted by World Bank, “Even where access (to potable water) exists, services have been characterized for decades by poor management, inadequate financing and low levels of investment.”<sup>9</sup>

While planning and constructing a well-designed clean water project can be daunting, maintaining the systems in the years after the initial construction process is even more challenging. Volunteers return home and attentions wane, leaving beneficiaries with a complex infrastructure they cannot maintain.

What starts out as a clean drinking water system soon devolves into a system providing only contaminated water, or worse, a system that does not function at all.



# 1.84 Million

people in Honduras are  
in **critical need** of  
water, hygiene, and  
sanitation services.

OCHA

## Our Approach

To date, VHC Medical Brigade has built clean water systems in twelve communities. We are working steadily towards the United Nations’ Sustainable Development Goal of ensuring the availability and sustainable management of water and sanitation for all, one community at a time.

In 2022, the Rural Clean Water Project focused on two main activities: completing the water supply hardware and supporting sustainable, community-led water management committees.



With the support of the Rotary Club and in collaboration with the local government, we completed our largest-ever clean water project. We brought clean, tap water into the homes of over 600 people in the rural mountain villages of Veracruz and El Tablón.

The water must travel from a dam built high on the mountain, through seven kilometers of piping, into a 20,000-gallon concrete tank, then through chlorinators, until finally flowing to the homes of families and the community health clinic in Veracruz, which VHC Medical Brigade also built. With training from VHC Medical Brigade, the community water boards have taken full ownership of maintaining and properly treating their water. The communities work together to ensure the water source remains sustainable.

Community-led water boards lead the maintenance to keep the system repaired and running. To assist these volunteer boards, a Water Technical Advisor visits each community on a monthly basis, meets with the Water Board, helps them develop strategies to address problems that have occurred, and provides hands-on guidance to help them make necessary repairs.

Water quality monitoring is provided by monthly visits from the Water Technical Advisor, who has established a working relationship with each of the water boards.



In addition, Brigade personnel perform spot measurements of chlorination levels on a more frequent basis. This monitoring program, run in collaboration with a Honduran NGO, has helped to secure a reliable clean drinking water source in each of the 12 communities served by the water projects initiated by the Brigade.

Finally, the cornerstone of reliable clean water systems is education. Therefore, the Brigade provides regular community-wide educational sessions focusing on health, hygiene, sanitation, and proper use of treated water, to adult members of the community and to children in schools.

Additional training is conducted via periodic formal half-day sessions, covering issues such as the repair of pressure relief stations, chlorinator maintenance, or repair of leaking valves.

# OUR INTERNATIONAL MEDICAL PROGRAM

## The Need

Honduras, with a population of approximately 9 million people, has limited healthcare infrastructure and hospital capacity. The country has only 9.5 hospital beds per 10,000 people,<sup>9</sup> (the second lowest in Central America) and the number of medical doctors is among the lowest in the world, with only 5.5 doctors per 10,000 people.<sup>10</sup>

Although the government ostensibly provides health services, public hospitals and clinics in Honduras are understaffed, underfunded, and do not have essential equipment and maintenance. Critical care capacity is severely restricted in many regional hospitals, such as Santa Teresa Hospital in Comayagua, which lacks functioning ventilators.

The overburdened health system was further strained throughout the COVID-19 pandemic, forcing many hospitals to postpone non-critical surgeries, such as hernia repairs, hysterectomies, and cataract removals.<sup>11</sup> Our partner hospitals report their longest backlogs in history, with many patients waiting years for procedures.

58%  
of **women** in Honduras  
**lack access** to  
obstetric and  
gynecologic services.

OCHA

Accessing specialist care in Honduras is also difficult, with serious consequences such as leaving children with visual impairment and the inability to read due to untreated strabismus.

Similarly, a lack of standard procedures, like prostate surgery, leave elderly and vulnerable people in pain, robbed of their independence and dignity - all because surgical services cannot meet the needs of the population.

## Our Approach

The Brigade's International Health Program is dedicated to providing medical services, supplies, training, equipment, and surgeries to our medical partners in Honduras.

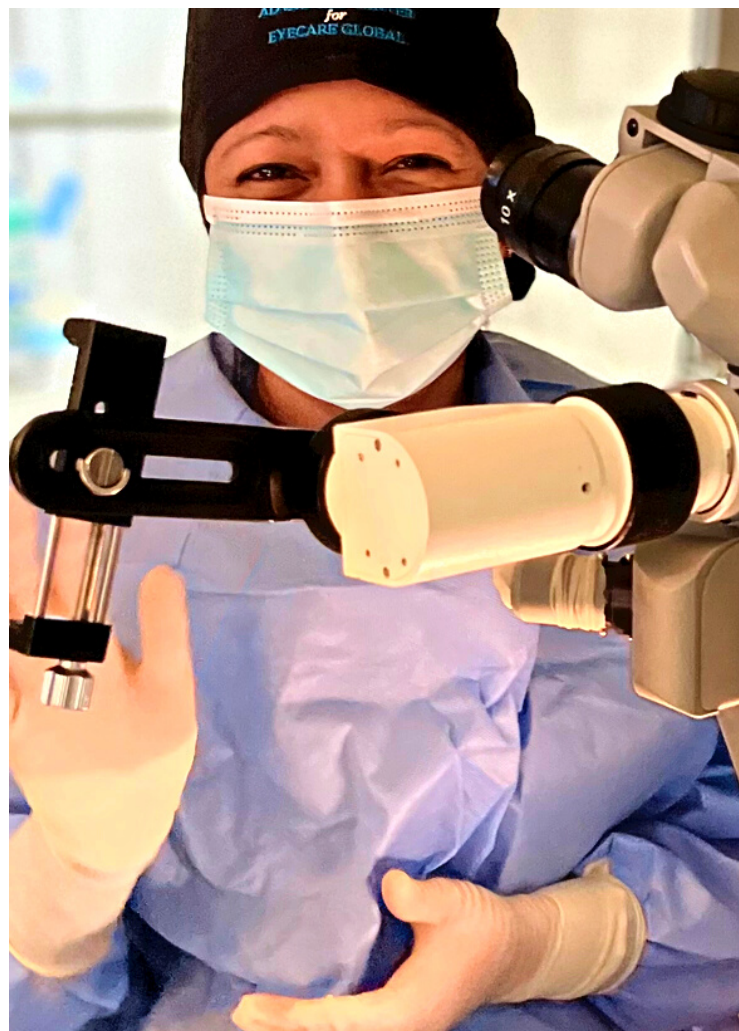


Our team of medical professionals includes top-rated surgeons, all of whom received their education or completed their residency at prestigious schools including Harvard Medical School, Yale, Georgetown, and the University of Virginia. They are accompanied by equally skilled teams of nurses, operating room technicians, physiotherapists, and biomedical engineers.

All of our medical teams generously volunteer their time and expertise, covering their travel and logistical expenses to support our work in Honduras.

The objectives of our International Health Program are:

- To ensure access to healthcare for the most vulnerable.
- To train and equip health professionals & volunteers.
- To support the needs of our partners in Honduras.
- To promote the health and empowerment of women and girls.



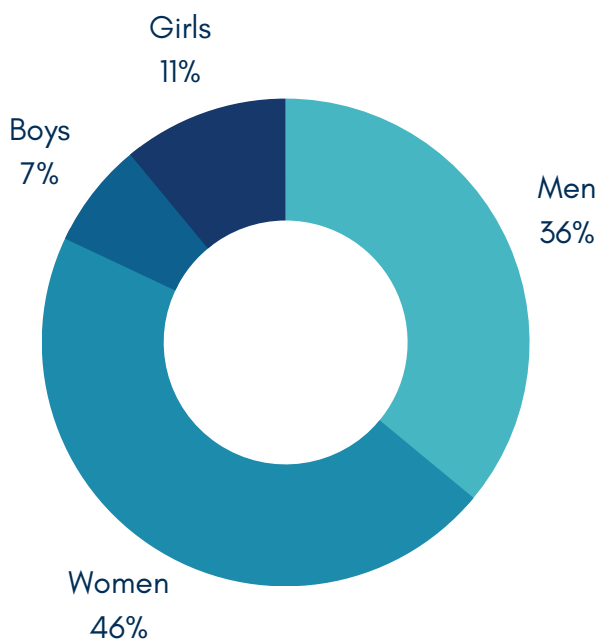
# SURGICAL TRIPS

In 2022, the Brigade delivered 136 life-changing surgeries for vulnerable people including children, elders, and women. This was a record number of cases in the Brigade’s history, and it was particularly impactful due to the backlog of surgeries resulting from COVID delays, especially for women and girls.

During the Brigade's most recent surgical trip in November 2022, 52 US volunteers, consisting of 44 healthcare professionals, eight logistics and support staff, collaborated closely with Honduran medical professionals, free clinics, and public hospitals to identify the most urgent cases, with a focus on those that were challenging for local staff to treat.



They then selected low-income or destitute individuals who could not afford the necessary surgical procedures. The teams provided pre-surgical preparation, anesthesia, surgical procedures, and post-operative care while working closely with local operating rooms, equipping them and enhancing local capacity in the process. Of the 136 surgeries performed, there were no reported complications, reflecting a high quality of care and attention to detail.



Type of Surgery	
General	28
Gynecology	20
Ophthalmology	65
Urology	23



# SURGICAL TRIP 2022



# LOCAL PARTNER TRAINING

In 2022, our medical teams expanded training efforts, partnering with Comayagua's primary fire department to emphasize strong local collaboration. In November, our volunteer biomedical engineers trained firefighters to use automatic defibrillators. In return, the fire department offered to provide first aid and transport training to our community health workers in 2023, exemplifying reciprocal collaboration with our Honduran partners.

Simultaneously, our medical team, led by one of our volunteer specialized respiratory therapists, trained 25 doctors and nurses in Sta. Teresa Hospital's neonatal intensive care unit. The training covered crucial aspects like feeding, positioning, and responding to premature infants, enhancing healthcare quality in the region.



Our ophthalmology partnerships also exceeded expectations in 2022. We partnered with ACE Global, San Felipe Hospital and San Benito Clinic to hold ophthalmology clinics at SBJ twice a month and perform surgery once a month. Adding to this success, one of the Brigade's volunteer doctors agreed to participate as a mentor, strengthening the partnership and improving care for low-income patients in Comayagua.

This program has brought critical eye care to patients who lacked access and serves as a beacon of hope for the community. We aim to continue expanding partnerships to bring essential healthcare services to more communities in need.

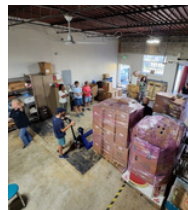


# MEDICAL EQUIPMENT & SUPPLIES

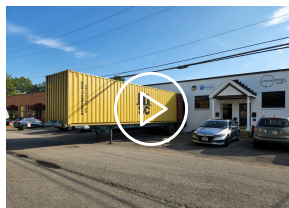
Our partners in Honduras, who serve low-income patients, face budget constraints and shortages of medical equipment and supplies. To help address this, our International Medical Program provides the necessary equipment and supplies tailored to meet the specific needs of our partners in Honduras.

Our field team works closely with our Honduran partners to understand their needs, while our volunteers in Virginia work tirelessly throughout the year to receive and sort donations. Our team of experts inspects each gently used medical equipment item, including anesthesia machines, EKG monitors, ultrasounds, operation tables and lights, wheelchairs, walkers, and crutches, to ensure that they are in good condition and not close to expiration.

Once the donations are assessed, they are paired with the identified field needs and carefully packed for transport to Honduras. This collaborative effort ensures that our partners receive the quality medical equipment and supplies that they need to provide essential care to their patients, regardless of their financial circumstances.



Thanks to donors, the Brigade delivered over \$93,000 in equipment, supplies, and pharmaceuticals to San Benito Jose Clinic, Sta. Teresa Hospital, and San Felipe Hospital in Tegucigalpa, the Central de Salud near Montecillos, and the Comayagua Fire Department in 2022. These donations were in addition to the pharmaceuticals supplied to the clinics as part of the Rural Development Program.



# OUR FINANCIALS OVERVIEW

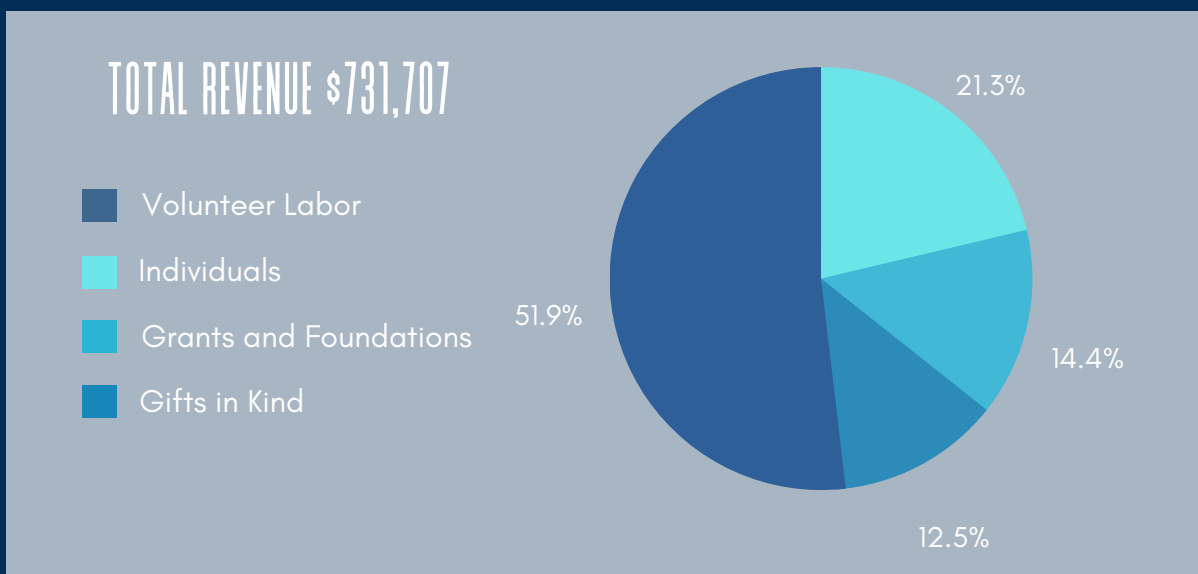
## OUR REVENUE

The Brigade continues to leverage donated funds with in-kind physical donations and volunteer hours from medical and other professional volunteers.

In 2022, we successfully raised a total of \$298,120 through a combination of individual contributions (\$178,049) and grants and donations from corporations and foundations (\$120,071).

Additionally, our efforts were further bolstered by in-kind donations of supplies and equipment worth \$104,248, bringing the overall value of our donations to \$402,368.

The backbone of the Brigade has always been our volunteers, whose dedication and hard work are made possible by the donations we receive. In 2022, the estimated market value of the volunteer labor was \$433,587, bringing the combined total of donations and volunteer labor to an impressive \$731,707.

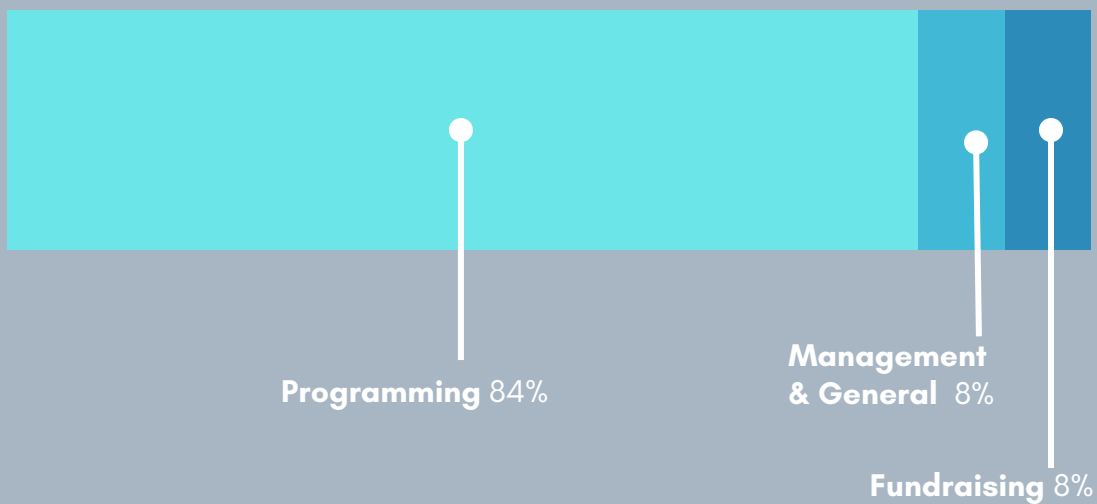


# OUR EXPENDITURES

In 2022, the Brigade invested \$356,666, including \$215,265 for programming, \$70,027 for general management, and \$71,374 for fundraising. When donated goods and volunteer time are included, total programming investments come to \$773,100 (84% of total), plus \$70,027 (8% of total) for general management, and \$71,374 (8% of total) for fundraising.

All of this work was made possible thanks to the kindness of our donors and partners. Over the years the Brigade has grown our outreach, building a small but capable team to lead the efforts. Thanks to the incredible efforts of our volunteers, we have been able to have an outsized impact with our small budgets.

## ALLOCATION OF EXPENSES



Programming expenses include spending, donated goods, and volunteer labor

# FROM THE EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

We were delighted to finish strong in 2022, and I am confident that the best is yet to come!

We have been thrilled to witness growth in areas such as ophthalmological services and new collaboration with fire departments, with even more potential partnerships in the works.

The unwavering dedication of our community health workers is one of the Brigade's most significant achievements. I have rarely seen such empowerment, ownership, and professionalism among a volunteer corps in my 18 years of working with NGOs. These women and men are well-trained and eager to learn, while we are eager to help them continue to grow. Together, we already plan to help rural communities improve nutritional and education support for the most vulnerable girls and boys. And with other exciting opportunities like expanded first aid and resuscitation, expanded women's health services, and outreach to the homes of young children, the potential for growth is immense.

Our International Medical Program is also set to reach new heights in 2023. Our physiotherapy/rehabilitation and eye care programs will resume after a two-year hiatus, providing much needed eyecare, physiotherapy services, and technical training. Likewise, our surgical program will continue in 2023, bringing desperately needed surgeries to low-income patients who otherwise lack services.

We continued to grow our team of talented staff and volunteers in 2022. With this growth, we aim to expand our capacity to measure the qualitative impact of our work, helping us to optimize our approaches. In all, I am confident that with the help of our dedicated team and capable partners can achieve great things in 2023.

None of our work would be possible without the generosity and faithfulness of our supporters, who provide us with the resources we need to continue making a difference in the lives of those we serve. We are immensely grateful for the unwavering support of our incredible volunteers and donors, who are the pillars of support that allow us to change lives for the better in Honduras.



M. Aaron Moore  
Executive Director  
VHC Medical Brigade



M. Aaron Moore



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# WE THANK YOU

FOR YOUR CONTINUED SUPPORT OF

# OUR PROGRAMS

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The VHC Medical Brigade is a 501(c)(3) nonprofit organization. Federal ID #37-1659721