

Health Center with FEMA Funds Opens in San Lorenzo

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San Juan, Puerto Rico – Residents of the town of San Lorenzo and its neighboring communities can now rely on the services provided by the Corporation for Health Services and Advanced Medicine (COSSMA, in Spanish), following the reconstruction of its facilities with funds from the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) for damage caused by Hurricane María.

An award of about \$6 million supported the demolition and reconstruction of the building, which already provides primary health services to around 3,000 people per month. The former structure was flooded due to the storm, which destroyed it and made it impossible to receive employees and care for their patients.

“The COSSMA team is part of the first responders who cared for Hurricane María survivors in the immediate aftermath of the disaster. This completed project demonstrates how we can rebuild facilities to strengthen them for other disasters so that medical personnel do not face similar challenges in the future when serving communities,” said Federal Disaster Recovery Coordinator José Baquero.

COSSMA San Lorenzo has about 50 employees and offers medical services for adults, pediatrics, gynecology and obstetrics; mental health, oral health, vaccination, laboratory and pharmacy; and other support services such as HIV prevention, case management of chronic conditions, nutrition and health promotion.

The outpatient center began its services in San Lorenzo in the early 2000s. By 2017, the administration had just begun their expansion process, when Hurricane María hit.

COSSMA San Lorenzo’s clinic director, Soquiliz Rivera, explained that the facilities were destroyed after the storm. However, the clinic staff continued to offer services to the community in temporary facilities such as tents, trailers and rented clinics. “We learned that the structure was an important aspect, but it was



not everything. The essence of each employee, of being able to serve, always remained, even if it was in a different way. United colleagues who, regardless of the fact that the clinic was not in the same condition as before, were willing to serve,” Rivera said.

FEMA’s allocation allowed the demolition of the facility in 2018. It also allowed its reconstruction following building codes, to make the best use of the space and to strengthen their services. The agency’s funds included mitigation measures to prevent leaks and to reinforce the air conditioners in the event of high winds.

The new building began offering services in 2022. Rivera added that, after Hurricane Fiona, the new center did not have any leakage problems and was able to reopen its facilities the following day without any setbacks.

COSSMA’s executive director, Norma Antomattei, said that “after the devastating passage of Hurricane María, COSSMA’s infrastructure in San Lorenzo suffered severe damage that resulted in its demolition. However, the tenacity, commitment and professionalism of the COSSMA Board of Directors and staff, added to the valuable support of our patients and the San Lorenzo community, allowed us to maintain the continuity of our services, despite the impact of the hurricane and the subsequent COVID-19 pandemic”.

For his part, the executive director of the Central Office for Recovery, Reconstruction and Resiliency, Manuel Laboy Rivera, said that “I acknowledge the diligence of COSSMA’s leadership in the development of this important health center that offers services to patients in San Lorenzo and neighboring towns. I reiterate the commitment of COR3’s team to support in technical matters of the reconstruction works in other projects of health centers from nonprofit organizations like COSSMA, as well as municipal, because they are the first aid during emergencies, but they also promote the preventive care of patients.”

To date, FEMA has awarded over \$30.8 billion for nearly 10,800 Public Assistance projects to address the reconstruction of a more resilient Puerto Rico.

For more information about Puerto Rico’s recovery, visit fema.gov/disaster/4339, fema.gov/disaster/4473 and recovery.pr. Follow us on our social media at Facebook.com/FEMAPuertoRico, Facebook.com/COR3pr and Twitter @COR3pr.



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