



Ideas were flowing at this year's kick-off meeting.

## Hello!

Welcome to our first quarterly update of 2023! We started the year by bringing together our amazing team – now 90-and-counting – to gather our energy and set our intentions. We emerged ready to move forward with exciting initiatives on multiple fronts, including groundbreaking research to support healthy births, enhanced HPV-based cervical cancer screening in our new lab, expanded family planning services, and our first post-Covid community nutrition class.

These efforts are more important than ever in light of the ongoing climate and economic challenges and national political events that are deeply affecting the indigenous communities where we work. Just one example is the recent move to disqualify Movement for the Liberation of the Peoples (MLP) Candidate Thelma Cabrera, a prominent indigenous rights advocate, from running in this summer's national elections. On a more promising note, on Tuesday, **the US Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) in Guatemala brought together the Executive Secretariat of the Council of Ministers of Health of Central America and the Dominican Republic for a conversation entitled *Health Equity for Indigenous People in Central America***. Our Chief Medical Director Waleska López Canú was among the presenters, along with experts from the Universidad del Valle de Guatemala. It is so heartening and essential to have the opportunity to

confront this critical issue with health leaders from across the region. They heard that outcomes on important health indicators like malnutrition and deaths from childbirth are twice as bad for indigenous people in Guatemala as they are for non-indigenous people. These are the gaps we work to close every day.

As we continue these critical efforts in Guatemala, our thoughts also are with the many people and communities struggling in the face of conflicts, earthquakes, and other natural disasters across the world.

Amidst the strife, I hope that you are finding moments of peace and perhaps glimpses of early spring as we move into March!

Warm wishes,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Anne E. Kraemer". The signature is fluid and cursive, with the first name "Anne" being the most prominent.

- Anne Kraemer, Chief Executive Officer



Dr. Montenegro followed her passion for community-based research.

## CONGRATS TO DR. GABRIELA MONTENEGRO!

We are thrilled to share that Research Fellow Dr. Gabriela Montenegro is one of seven talented scientists honored with the [2023 OWSD-Elsevier Foundation Award for Early-Career Women Scientists in the Developing World](#).

Among other things, Dr. Montenegro, a nutrition expert, leads our work investigating the impact of daily egg consumption on infant growth and development in rural Guatemala.

After studying in Guatemala, the US, the Netherlands, and Germany, Dr. Montenegro returned to Guatemala to realize her dream of working as a researcher focused on community health in her home country. She is excited to have the opportunity to foster collaborative, science-based research to shift policies and create effective practices to improve health outcomes.

"We are one Guatemala, and we have to work together for changes, make our contributions as citizens. We at Wuqu' Kawoq are committed to doing this."

## STARTING THE YEAR ON A HIGH NOTE

In January, CEO [Anne Kraemer](#) had the chance to meet with [Luis von Ahn](#), Guatemalan-born [Duolingo](#) co-founder and CEO, [MacArthur Foundation](#) Fellow, computer scientist, and wonderfully generous supporter of women's and girls' equality through the [Luis von Ahn Foundation](#)!

The Foundation is among those leading the way in new approaches to philanthropy focused on high impact through long-term, trust-based, collaborative relationships with grantees.

We are so fortunate to be among the initial organizations the Foundation supports and to have the opportunity to learn and build with this inspiring community!





## CELEBRATE INTERNATIONAL WOMEN'S DAY WITH A GIFT SUPPORTING OUR WOMEN!

**International Women's Day is March 8: Show your support and get a commemorative mug!** We are proud to have a staff that is more than 80% women, including our Chief Medical Officer, computer programmers, and most program managers. Still, women remain enormously under-represented and under-paid in workforces in Guatemala and so many other countries. **So, we are excited to get behind International Women's Day on March 8 and this year's theme, #EmbraceEquity.** Donors who make a gift of \$50 or more during the month of March will receive a mug featuring the 2023 theme in English, Spanish, and Kaqchikel.

Show your support!

Give now!

## FIGHTING MALNUTRITION TOGETHER

We have just completed our first community nutrition workshops since the arrival of Covid-19! These powerful, four-month workshops allow moms and other caregivers to support one another and share ideas for feeding their children healthier, more diverse diets using locally available foods.

When Covid precluded community gatherings, we used the time to revise and improve the workshop curriculum. The new classes focus on a different theme each month: nutrition during pregnancy, breastfeeding, supplementary feeding (adding other foods and nutrients to babies' diets), and preventing malnutrition.

In each class, caregivers offer their own experiences and ideas and learn new ways to improve their family's nutrition through cooking classes.

The first new series of classes began in October and wrapped up in February. It is a joy to be able to bring together mothers to build stronger futures for their children!



Mashing up vegetables to mix in micronutrients – a strategy to get kids to eat the nutrient-filled “sprinkles” that they normally dislike.





## RESEARCH HIGHLIGHT: DETECTING AND PREVENTING COMPLICATIONS DURING PREGNANCY AND BIRTH

Our research team is busy with a range of ambitious studies designed to find practical ways to address some of the biggest challenges facing indigenous communities in rural Guatemala, including high rates of deaths and other serious problems during pregnancy and childbirth. In a new study funded by the National Institutes of Health, maternal health researchers are exploring the potential of using artificial intelligence (AI) to predict and address concerns during pregnancy.

AI makes it possible to analyze and compare large amounts of data to find patterns and predict outcomes. In this case, researchers are looking at data collected from recordings of fetal heartbeats conducted with low-cost, portable, handheld Doppler devices in rural communities. This approach offers the potential for midwives using widely available tools to gather information that can alert caregivers to possible issues early on so that mothers can be closely monitored and treated to prevent more serious problems. This would represent a major step forward in monitoring health concerns during pregnancy in low-resource settings around the globe.

## PATIENT PROFILE: CLOSING GAPS AND OPENING POSSIBILITIES

A fall during a game with friends led to a troubling discovery for Alexander when he was just six years old. He suffered a fracture, which turned out to be the first of many. Alexander and his family learned that he had osteogenesis imperfecta, a rare genetic condition also known as brittle bone disease that causes bones to break easily.

While medications and physical therapy can help with building bone strength, no services are available near his rural community, so he has to make the hours-long trip into Guatemala City to receive the care he needs. Moreover, Alexander, now 32, has lost the ability to walk as a result of his condition.

Often in rural Guatemala, where public health services are patchy and poorly resourced, patients with rare conditions like Alexander's are sidelined with few prospects for improving their health and living independently. We learned of Alexander's situation through his mother, a patient in our Women's Health Program, and worked with him and his family to reduce his isolation and increase his opportunities. It became clear that lack of mobility was among his major obstacles, so we helped him procure a wheelchair that gives him the mobility he needs to operate a small store. By listening and working in partnership with his family, we were able to identify a straightforward solution that makes a significant difference in his health and well-being.



## PRESENTATIONS & PUBLICATIONS

### **Barriers to COVID-19 vaccine acceptance to improve messages for vaccine uptake in indigenous populations in the central highlands of Guatemala: a participatory qualitative study.**

This is the most recent publication from our collaboration on Covid vaccine acceptance with colleagues from the UCSF Institute for Global Health Sciences and Stanford Center for Health Education. The study found three major barriers to vaccination: (1) a lack of available easily understandable, linguistically appropriate and culturally sensitive COVID-19 vaccine information; (2) issues with vaccine access that prevented people from being vaccinated efficiently and quickly; and (3) misinformation and disinformation that triggered fear and mistrust.

In 2023, the same team of collaborators are building on this work with a study investigating approaches to improve acceptance of childhood vaccines. Childhood vaccinations in Guatemala were among the lowest in Latin America before the Covid pandemic and declined further during the pandemic.

### [Qualitative study of pathways to care among adults with diabetes in rural Guatemala](#)

Patients with diabetes in rural Guatemala tend to cycle among a variety of providers and sources of care, including public, private, non-profit facilities, and even pharmacies, increasing the risk of more serious complications, according to this study published in BMJ Open. Researchers from our Center for Research on Indigenous Health contributed to the study, which included interviews with patients in two rural regions of Guatemala. The study found that uneven resources and poor experiences at public facilities and costs shouldered by patients in both public and private settings led to fragmented care for the growing number of people with diabetes in rural regions. In some cases, patients seek care only when experiencing acute issues rather than consistently monitoring their conditions with providers. Discontinuous care has been shown to be less effective in managing diabetes and can raise patients' risks of more serious complications, such as amputations and death. The study's authors recommend strengthening primary care in public systems and working across sectors to improve diabetes care in Guatemala and other countries experiencing similar challenges.

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*Thank you so much for your ongoing support!*



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