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Fears of a catastrophe in Papua New Guinea as new wave of COVID-19 cases hits the country

16 March 2020

Papua New Guinea is facing a potential catastrophe with an alarming increase in COVID-19 cases. At least 2,269 cases have been reported since March 9, and almost 100 new cases confirmed daily.

Large-scale testing is very low across Papua New Guinea, with a limited number of facilities able to conduct regular screening and testing, leading to concerns that that the virus is spreading unchecked in communities.

“One of the challenges for Papua New Guinea is the cost of testing and treatment,” says Diane Unagi, Caritas Australia Country Representative for Papua New Guinea.

“The public hospitals are already overwhelmed and there are major delays in being tested and receiving results. A COVID-19 test in a private clinic, which most people prefer, can cost up to AUD \$300, and even then they are often not available.”

“For a country where 85.7 per cent of the population is considered to be living in poverty, and 38 per cent live on less than US\$1.90 a day, this means that getting a COVID-19 test is just not feasible for most people.”

The government of Papua New Guinea has signed off on the regulatory approval needed for the COVAX Facility to bring in the COVID-19 vaccine to the country, and the first shipment of the Oxford-AstraZeneca vaccine is expected to arrive in April. The first 288,000 doses will be prioritised for healthcare and essential workers.

Caritas Australia and other international development NGOs in Australia encourage the Australian government to continue to support Papua New Guinea with the distribution of personal protective equipment to health workers, COVID-19 awareness training in the community, and the COVID-19 vaccine rollout.

Caritas Australia is supporting church and NGO partners on the ground, prioritising preventative health measures including community education and the distribution of protective personal equipment for health facilities and health workers.

Caritas Australia is accepting donations to help support vulnerable communities facing COVID-19 through the COVID-19 Appeal. Visit [caritas.org.au](https://www.caritas.org.au) or call 1800 024 413 toll free to provide much needed support to some of our closest neighbours.

Caritas Australia is a member of one of the world’s largest humanitarian networks, with 162 agencies operating in 200 countries and territories.

The Catholic agency for international aid and development

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